



MINUTES

Regular Town Council Meeting

4:00 PM - Tuesday, May 9, 2023
Council Chambers

The Regular Town Council of the Town of Beech Mountain was called to order on Tuesday, May 9, 2023, at 4:00 PM, in the Council Chambers, with the following members present:

COUNCIL PRESENT: Mayor Barry Kaufman
Vice Mayor Jimmie Accardi
Councilmember Weidner Abernethy
Councilmember Kelly Melang

COUNCIL EXCUSED:

STAFF PRESENT: Attorney Stacy Eggers, IV
Town Manager Bob Pudney
Town Clerk Tamara Mercer
Director of Special Projects Riley Hatch

1. CALL TO ORDER

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

- 2.1. Mr. Pudney requested to amend the agenda to include a Resolution opposing SB 317/ HB 562, the proposed legislation amending control over certain subdivision styled 'workforce housing' and similar bills to eliminate local authority over development, to which Mayor Kaufman requested a motion to amend the agenda.

Motion

Jimmie Accardi made a motion to amend the agenda to include a resolution opposing SB 317 /HB 562 which severely restricts local control over workforce housing and Weidner Abernethy seconded the motion. CARRIED. unanimously.

3. INVOCATION- DEWEY CYCLONE BRETT

4. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

5. PUBLIC HEARING FY: 2023-24 ANNUAL BUDGET

5.1. Annual Budget Public Hearing 1st reading

Mayor Kaufman requested a motion to open the public hearing on the proposed Annual Budget for fiscal year 2023-24 and Vice Mayor Accardi moved to open the Public Hearing and Mr. Abernethy seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Tim Curtis of 1414 Beech Mountain Parkway said critical issues facing the town are water supply and infrastructure. The debt from the bond referendums and infrastructure projects were Mr. Curtis' concerns and he wants the town to quantify the impact to the ad valorem tax rate and taxpayers.

Mr. Bob Rusczak of 132 Wintergreen Way questioned cutting the budget, believing it to be a fallacy as revenues and expenses are increasing. He said the town raised taxes and is not revenue neutral. Mr. Rusczak was concerned the budget contained wants versus needs. He asked about paving Tamarack Road and suggested there be level spending.

Mr. Robert McMichael 7110 Pine Ridge Road recognized the hard work and that the goal of the budget is to lower taxes. He did not believe the tax cuts were enough and he expected at least a million-dollars in tax cuts. Mr. McMichael agreed with funding the EMS Station and salaries should provide a living wage. The user fees have increased so he is trying to understand the budget how five-million dollars is spent. He asked these questions last year and wants clear answers.

Mr. Urs Gsteiger of 124 Raven Road has lived here 35 years and he has reviewed the proposed budget and differentiated between needs from wants. There is confusion with the general fund and sanitation fund. Sanitation and water fund are separate from the property tax, which attributes to the General Fund. But our infrastructure is funded by the water and sewer rates said Mr. Gsteiger. Lake Coffey is to be funded by the GO bond, but we may have other sources of funding that project added Mr. Gsteiger. So spending is too high and Mr. Gsteiger disagreed with raising the property taxes to increase the budget. Salary wages have increased and is out of control and Mr. Gsteiger said we only lost a few employees, so raise only those employees who quit not all the employees' wages. The manager and finance officer should provide guidance and with that Mayor Kaufman called time for Mr. Gsteiger's comments.

Mr. Ben Swadley of 207 North Pinnacle Ridge Road contributed to the budget discussion saying homeowners do not want to pay more in taxes, but we have hyperinflation at 20% and this is a resort area. People are attracted to our mountain elevation and water is critical. Our landscape encourages people to come but this is at a cost. Mr. Swadley urged council to continue to support the recreation department as that is low hanging fruit and gets cut first. He argues because of our outdoor recreation experience, hiking and biking trails, we increase our property values. We should continue to grow our recreation department and provide them funding support to succeed said Mr. Swadley.

Motion

Kelly Melang made a motion to close the public hearing and Weidner Abernethy seconded the motion. CARRIED. unanimously.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

6.1. Mrs. Sandy Carr of 505 Pine Ridge Road said the first Farmers Market is scheduled for June 2nd. The first 100 people will receive a free market bag and a white pine seedling to plant. In partnership with the North Carolina Forestry Department and Parks and Rec Department , we will supply planting instructions. White pine seedlings are fast growing. Ms. Carr added that Beech Mountain is now included in the farmers market mountain area programs with nine other towns. This is free publicity for town and helps families in the fresh produce farmer's market program. Ms. Carr added a thank you to the TDA for providing the market bags.

Mr. Adam Sellers of 105 Cricket Way, moved here three years ago and was concerned with the town's procedures and impervious water flow. He read an email between property owners regarding a ditch culvert and problem with water flow and undergrounds streams. He was concerned with his treatment by the town and had issues with roadway upgrades. It cost him \$350 to report and file his Board of Adjustment case.

Mr. Nick Wilson of 515 Charter Hills Road was concerned with the yard debris pickup as the ordinance only allows for certain pickups per year. Mr. Wilson requests more than four times per year. He also suggested we have a Founder's Day event. Mr. Wilson added that the town is charged with other people's money.

Ms. Therese Barry of 100 Squirrel was concerned with sky lanterns. She said she found one on April 13th and they are illegal. Sky lanterns are hazardous, cause wildfires, and damage to homes. She reported this to the fire department. She suggested short-term rentals receive rules and regulation as burning sky lanterns is not allowed.

No one else elected to speak, and Mayor Kaufman closed the public comment portion of the meeting.

7. BEECH MOUNTAIN RESORT 2022-2023 SEASON REPORT, RYAN COSTIN GENERAL MANAGER

7.1. Mr. Costin did not attend the meeting due to a conflict.

8. CONSENT AGENDA

8.1. Adoption of Minutes April 11, 2023

8.2. Requesting Council Declare the following town owned lots as surplus

Motion

Approve as surplus with order to dispose.

- 8.3. Advertise Delinquent Property Taxes
- 8.4. Revised Agenda to include Resolution No. 2023-06, a Resolution Opposing Senate Bill 317/ House Bill 562

Motion

Weidner Abernethy made a motion to approve consent agenda to include: Adoption of Minutes April 11, 2023, Declare surplus of town owned lots to be sold on auction: 506 St. Andrews Road, 222 Greenbriar Road, 133 W. Blueberry Lane, 234 Wild Daisy Lane, 222 Dogwood Lane, 159 Wild Daisy Lane, 109 Greenbriar Road, order to advertise 2022 delinquent property taxes, Resolution No. 2023-06 - Resolution Opposing SB 317/ HB 562, and Kelly Melang seconded the motion. CARRIED. unanimously.

9. NEW BUSINESS

- 9.1. General Obligation Bond Resolution, Intent to apply to LGC

In response to Councilmember Abernethy's question regarding the General Obligation Bond addressed last month, Mr. Pudney said that this process allows Staff to publish the advertisement. The published notice states that citizens are allowed to appeal by filing a written objection with Local Government Commission.

Motion

Weidner Abernethy made a motion to approve the Intent to apply to Local Government Commission and posting the notification for citizens who wish to appeal the General Obligation Bond and Kelly Melang seconded the motion. CARRIED. unanimously.

- 9.2. National Police Week Proclamation

Mayor Kaufman read the National Police Week Proclamations which honors our police department and all law enforcement personnel.

- 9.3. TDA board member vacancy

Due to the resignation by Tourism Development board member Kendall Cox, Mayor Kaufman nominated Dr. Donald Carringer to the vacant seat.

Motion

Kelly Melang made a motion to appoint Dr. Donald Carringer to the vacant position on the Tourism Development Authority to a term expiring December 2026 and Jimmie Accardi seconded the motion. CARRIED. unanimously.

10. TOWN MANAGER AND STAFF REPORTS

- 10.1. Town Manager's report and 'hello to John Hoffmann watching on the Town's live stream channel!

Mr. Pudney noted that at the mayors and managers' meeting today, the Town of Blowing Rock, Boone, Seven Devils, and Beech Mountain share the same problems and are working together to address issues in our region.

- Watauga Mayors' and Managers' Luncheon hosted by Beech Mountain
- Town Hall/ Visitor Center expansion and renovation
- Lake Coffey/ Lake Santis reservoir
- Skiloft Road area project
- Wayfinding signage and town beautification
- Genesis site cleanup at Buckeye Lake
- Annual Budget work session FY:2023-2024 May 17th at 2:00 pm

On June 15th at the Beech Mountain Club, we host our regional Economic Development Commission. This is a large group of influential local leaders including Appalachian State's representatives and Watauga county's staff to address workforce housing.

10.2. Budget and Financial Report - March 2023

10.3. Police Department Monthly Report

10.4. Fire Department Monthly Report

10.5. April Parks and Recreation Report 2023

10.6. Planning and Inspections Report for 2023-04

10.7. TDA Report May 2023

10.8. Monthly DOI Report

11. TOWN COUNCIL COMMENTS

11.1. Vice Mayor Accardi said the last seven months have been a culmination of working on the annual budget. Emphasis has been on a 'maintenance' budget. May 17th is the Town Hall meeting where council hears citizens comments and suggestions at the budget workshop, and he encouraged citizens to attend and voice concerns to council.

Councilmember Abernethy was concerned with public comment time limits, favoring allowing more time. The old Public Works facility should be renovated and repaired as assets cost more if we kick the can down the road. The landscaping, new signs and rock walls look good and is an improvement from three years ago. The EMS Station and roadway progress are needs not wants. It is a disservice to not take care of Tamarack Road.

Councilmember Abernethy said due to the labor shortage, employee salaries and wages are up 72% in the corporate workplace. He supports the COLA increase. Over the years there has been a minimal COLA increase and he guesstimates we were lower than the marketplace. The backbone of the community is our employees. We can't cut services like the Police Department, then tell council to also stop infrastructure projects moving forward.

Councilmember Melang approves of this proposed budget. She added that we cannot cut the Parks and Recreation budget. The Rec Center and Beech Mountain events and outdoors programs are needed. She agreed with supporting the Staff and employees and supports the resolution addressing workforce housing. This summer's resort shows have big names such as Cheryl Crow. Mr. Costin could not attend but he would have highlighted this concert series.

In response to Mr. Gsteiger's suggestion, Mayor Kaufman said it was unrealistic to increase the pay of only one employee. We are competing with other towns in salary, healthcare, life-time benefits, so the police vehicle take-home program helps retain employees. Employee benefits costs have increased, and employees now pay 50% of family healthcare. Three years ago we implemented the plan for the cost increases to the employees said Mayor Kaufman.

Mayor Kaufman requested a motion to be recused to close session, and vice Mayor Accardi moved to go into executive session pursuant to NC GS 143-318.11 (a)(3) Attorney Client Matters.

12. CLOSED SESSION - PURSUANT TO NC GS 143-318.11 (A)(3) ATTORNEY CLIENT MATTERS

12.1. Mayor Kaufman reconvened the regular portion of the meeting and Vice Mayor Accardi moved to reconvene and Mr. Abernethy seconded the motion.

Mayor Kaufman requested a motion to proceed to allow Staff to proceed with the Skiloft area project.

Motion

Kelly Melang made a motion to allow Staff to proceed with the Skiloft area project and Jimmie Accardi seconded the motion. CARRIED. unanimously.

13. ADJOURNMENT

13.1. There being no further business, Mayor Kaufman requested a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

Motion

Weidner Abernethy made a motion to adjourn and Kelly Melang seconded the motion. CARRIED. unanimously.

Town Clerk

Mayor, Town of Beech Mountain