



# MINUTES

## Regular Town Council Meeting

4:00 PM - Tuesday, May 10, 2022  
Council Chambers

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The Regular Town Council of the Town of Beech Mountain was called to order on Tuesday, May 10, 2022, 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  
Councilmember Erin Gonyea

**COUNCIL EXCUSED:**

**STAFF PRESENT:** Attorney Stacy Eggers, IV  
Town Clerk Tamara Mercer

### 1. CALL TO ORDER

### 2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

- 2.1. Mayor Kaufman requested a motion to change the order of the agenda items, to which Vice Mayor Accardi agreed.

#### **Motion**

Jimmie Accardi made a motion to reorder the agenda items order from 5.) Public Comments to item number 8.) Public Comments and Weidner Abernethy seconded the motion. CARRIED. unanimously.

### 3. INVOCATION- CYCLONE BRETT

### 4. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

### 5. FEATURED LOCAL BUSINESS- SKI CELEBRATION, DAN GILBERT

- 5.1. Mr. Gilbert said Ski Celebration opened on Beech Mountain a year ago. He brought his business from a larger ski operation in Winterplace, West Virginia and included this local location in Beech. They service large groups such as youth groups and Boy Scouts. He owns one-third of Rascals restaurant and due to his experience this past year he is looking to expand.

The ski community and amenities are mature and staff helpful. He is impressed with our services such as Police Department checks on businesses every night. It has been a successful season and as a new investment based on Beech Mountain, the investment model did not project a profit, but they are so busy they will expand in our community. He looked at other places and is excited to have relocated to Beech Mountain.

He intends to expand his group lodging, ski shop, and equipment rental space to include the upcoming summer outdoor recreation season.

## **6. SUZIE KNEPKA PROCLAMATION RECOGNITION**

- 6.1. Proclamation recognizing Susie Knepka and her gardening and horticulture accomplishments read by Vice Mayor Accardi.

## **7. NATIONAL POLICE WEEK MAY 11-16**

- 7.1. To recognize National Police Week May 2022, Councilmember Melang read the information honoring our fallen Law Enforcement Officers and the events taking place in Washington and nationwide to recognize our Law Enforcement.

## **8. PUBLIC HEARING ANNUAL BUDGET FISCAL YEAR 2023**

- 8.1. Current Draft Proposal of the FY 2023 Annual Budget Public Hearing

Dr. Miller thanked Council for funding the new forthcoming ambulance and EMT Station and for supporting the new program as this will benefit all citizens on Beech Mountain.

The Annual Budget was presented to the Town Council, and this was a first reading. Public comments gathered were for informational purposes only.

## **9. CONSENT AGENDA**

- 9.1. Adoption of Minutes

### **Motion**

Jimmie Accardi made a motion to approve the April 12, 2022, minutes and Weidner Abernethy seconded the motion. CARRIED. unanimously.

- 9.2. Sale of Town Assets 109 Greenbriar Rd

### **Motion**

Erin Gonyea made a motion to accept and approve the sale of 109 Greenbriar Road and Jimmie Accardi seconded the motion. CARRIED. unanimously.

- 9.3. Order to Advertise

### **Motion**

Jimmie Accardi made a motion to approve the order to advertise the 2021 delinquent property taxes and Erin Gonyea seconded the motion. CARRIED. unanimously.

## **10. NEW BUSINESS**

### **10.1. Resolution of Council Support of local Tourism Development Authority Bill**

In response to Councilmember Melang's question regarding the Tourism related marketing and Tourism related operations, Mr. Pudney confirmed that the current legislation requires a two-thirds and one-third division of allocated funds, this Resolution addresses this issue. As currently allocated two-thirds of funds must go towards marketing. Representative Ray Pickett is sponsoring this local bill to address this issue which other towns such as Blowing Rock, Watauga County, Boone, as well as Beech Mountain to change the percentages to allow for 50% of funding may go towards capital projects. We are joining the other Tourism Development Authorities in passing legislation in Raleigh to change the allocation percentages explained Mr. Pudney.

#### **Motion**

Jimmie Accardi made a motion to support the Resolution for the Tourism Development Authority Bill for an Occupancy Tax allocation change to be sponsored by Representative Ray Pickett in our State legislation and Erin Gonyea seconded the motion. CARRIED. unanimously.

## **11. TOWN MANAGER AND STAFF REPORTS**

### **11.1. Finance Officer's Report**

It was noted by Mr. Pudney that the Town's expenditures were within the budget year's benchmark for sewer, water, and sanitation departments. Mayor Kaufman agreed that the department percentages were in-line for the year.

### **11.2. Town Manager's Office Report**

Mr. Pudney stated that after working on solution to emergency services contract with Avery County, we are moving forward with the EMS service with Watauga County beginning Saturday, May 14th at 0900 hours and the station will run a 24/7 paramedic coverage from Fire Station #2. The EMS unit is installed, and it will be a hybrid procedure while we continue to work with Avery County.

The Bark Park/ bathroom/ sled hill amenities which were funded by the TDA through occupancy tax dollars had a Ribbon Cutting ceremony on May 5th. No taxpayer moneys were used for the project and Mr. Pudney thanked support from all those involved.

NCDOT has begun milling, resurfacing, and re-striping Beech Mountain Parkway. The project will continue through May and June.

Mr. Pudney referenced the Public Works report, noting pages 178 and 179 there was 238-tons of solid waste, this is a 48% reduction in solid from last year. The construction debris restrictions and protocol measures put in place shows waste is lowered. Staff believes this trend will continue. There are no solid waste fee increases proposed in this budget as costs are lowered since we lower solid waste collections.

There was further discussion on public education and recycling process at the Convenience Center. The old recycle center improvements are underway with grading, landscaping and the picnic tables will be installed. Mayor Kaufman said the process to recycle is easier and cleaner.

The Parks and Recreation Department received an NCDOT grant of fifty bike helmets. This program is 100% grant funded by DOT and will be distributed by the Parks Department for child safety. There are one hundred children on our summer camp waiting list. The program is growing each year.

- 11.3. April Recreation Report 2022
- 11.4. DOI Report April 2022
- 11.5. Fire Department Monthly Report
- 11.6. Planning and Inspections Monthly Report 2022-04
- 11.7. Police Department Monthly Report

In response to Councilmember Melang's question about the Police statistics, Mr. Pudney explained there are stationery and directory patrols, and park and foot patrols. The Police Department meets people and records all community contacts, which is tracked in the reports.

- 11.8. TDA Report May 2022

## **12. TOWN COUNCIL COMMENTS**

- 12.1. Councilmember Melang welcomed the summer residents. The old Convenience Center park improvements look great as well as the new Bark Park bathroom.

Councilmember Abernethy asked about proposing a new tax rate and he inquired into the procedure, to which Attorney Eggers suggested he amend the agenda to add an item. The procedure requires a motion to amend the agenda. A majority vote would amend the agenda and to state the topic. Councilmember Abernethy motioned to amend the agenda to discuss the tax rate and the motion was seconded by Councilmember Melang. Councilmember Melang Councilmember Abernethy, Councilmember Gonyea, and Councilmember Accardi voted 'aye'. Mayor Kaufman voted 'nay'. Carried. 4-1.

Councilmember Abernethy noted the proposed tax rate as presented and projects to be funded were the EMS Unit, the employee COLA (Cost-of-living adjustment), and the portion that funded infrastructure. He said he supports all three. The past years did not keep up with the COLA, so there has been a low

increase in salaries and in the past infrastructure was neglected so the town is playing catch up.

He asked the manager what percentage of growth is anticipated, to which Mr. Pudney stated an 8% growth rate is projected in the financial model for this fiscal year. The property assessment value for ad valorem taxes and the general fund balance was discussed. Every cent generates 100,000 dollars said Mayor Kaufman. Councilmember Abernethy said the manager recommended 65-cent tax rate, but the Council went to 68-cents. The taxpayers do not need a further tax burden. He suggested to change the rate to 65-cents as Mr. Pudney proposed or lower it to 63-cents as this won't affect the general fund. Mr. Abernethy made a motion to approve a property tax rate of 63-cents. This will give the taxpayers a break and the Council can adjust the tax rate next year's budget if it was needed added Mr. Abernethy. Vice Mayor Accardi disagreed on projections for a growth rate, as that is theory and Council won't raise taxes in an election year. Mr. Abernethy believed Council would make a financial adjustment next year if we had to raise taxes.

Councilmember Gonyea said we must maintain a minimum emergency contingency fund and was concerned that at 63-cents the town would not remain healthy. Mr. Pudney input the proposed .63-nents into the financial model and he presented a budget with half-million-dollars less. He pointed out that it would provide a percentage of 52.7% of fund balance. He stated we can input such information in the finance model and update the projects as requested by Council. Mr. Abernethy pointed out the new revenue sources and growth rate and with that we can still fund the goals and projects, he reiterated his motion to reduce the tax rate to 63-cents, to which Councilmember Melang recommended 65-cents which was the original recommendation by the Manager's Office. Mr. Pudney input that data into the finance model and it produced an unassigned fun balance at 54%. Council further discussed these equations.

Attorney Eggers noted that a motion was on the table by Councilmember Abernethy to change the tax rate to 63-cent millage rate at per 100-dollars per property value and it requires a second for the staff to move forward in preparation of the annual budget. Vice Mayor Accardi seconded the motion. Councilmember Gonyea and Mayor Kaufman voted 'nay', and Vice Mayor Accardi, Councilmember Melang, and Councilmember Abernethy voted 'aye'. Motion carried 3-2.

Mr. Pudney stated that the tax rate in the Annual Budget will be presented at 63-cents. If Council will allow time for Staff to prepare and present the revised version for the annual budget, we will work on that for the June 14th meeting, this will include the ordinance pursuant to the law. A budget ordinance at 63-cents per 100-dollar of property valuation will be presented at the regular June 14th meeting.

Vice Mayor Accardi said the Parks Mud Run had 38 people participate and it was cold, wet, and muddy. Vice Mayor Accardi requested to schedule a Town Hall meeting this summer on topics proposed by citizens for transparency. Last Town Hall meeting held was regarding trash. Full-time

residents have concerns over parking at the Bark Park and playground. Mr. Accardi suggested resident passes for full-time residents to access parking for the amenities.

Councilmember Gonyea welcomed back our summer residents. There has been no construction slow down over this past winter. Congratulations to Vice Mayor Accardi on the upcoming birth of his son and to Sean Royal's growing family. She thanked Mr. Cyclone Brett for his invocations as well as the history passages he brings to the meetings. Councilmember Gonyea thanked Connie Pudney for the park artwork, the TDA, Susie Knepek and Dr. Miller. The Council member are always approachable for any citizen concerns.

The new ale house opens in June. Councilmember Gonyea agreed with Vice Mayor Accardi about the parking at the Bark Park. Mr. Pudney said the town has a three-year contract with the business franchise OttoParking for the collection of parking lot fees. Mr. Pudney said he will bring a solution next month for Council to consider on the meeting agenda. There was a discussion about the handicap parking spots, the site layout, and to add additional parking spots.

### **Motion**

Weidner Abernethy made a motion to revise the budget with the tax rate at .63 cents for ad valorem taxes and Jimmie Accardi seconded the motion. CARRIED. 3-2 (opposed: Barry Kaufman and Erin Gonyea).

## **13. CITIZENS' AGENDA COMMENTS**

**13.1.** Mayor Kaufman opened comments on the agenda to the audience to which Mrs. Sandy Carr commented on the property tax rate. She stated that for comparison statistics for a town of our size, the average fund balance as per our last year's audit, the accountant said our town is high and it is actually in the 30-percent average, so she was glad to hear Council was open to lowering the property tax rate.

Mr. Urs Gsteiger commented that last year's decision by Council to borrow money from the reserves is why the fund balance is under from previous reserves. He was against the tax rate and against property taxes doubling. This is a taxpayer burden and hardship said Mr. Gsteiger and it is not hard to make the choice to cut the budget. The revenue neutral property tax rate is 40.5-cents.

A citizen questioned the millage rate and property re-valuations from the county and there was discussion. Mr. Pudney added that ad valorem tax rates and property values are property specific to each tax property owner. Mayor Kaufman added that it is prudent to raise the COLA as recommended by the Manager's Office the provided services are the responsibility of the town to the citizens. It is important to retain employees.

## **14. ADJOURNMENT**

14.1. There being no further business, Mayor Kaufman requested a motion to adjourn at 5:27 p.m.

Note: the minutes are not a verbatim transcript of the proceedings.

**Motion**

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

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Town Clerk

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Mayor, Town of Beech Mountain