



MINUTES

Regular Town Council Meeting

4:00 PM - Tuesday, February 14, 2023
Council Chambers

The Regular Town Council of the Town of Beech Mountain was called to order on Tuesday, February 14, 2023, at 4:00 PM, in the Council Chambers, with the following members present:

COUNCIL PRESENT: Mayor Barry Kaufman
Councilmember Weidner Abernethy
Councilmember Kelly Melang

COUNCIL EXCUSED: Jimmie Accardi

STAFF PRESENT: Attorney Jonathan Green
Town Manager Bob Pudney
Town Clerk Tamara Mercer
Director of Special Projects Riley Hatch
Finance Officer Steve Smith
Building Inspector John Merritt

1. CALL TO ORDER

- 1.1. Please note: Vice Mayor Accardi teleconferenced into the meeting expressing his opinions, however, was not allowed to provide votes as he was not technically 'present' at the meeting.

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

- 2.1. Mayor Kaufman requested a motion to adopt the agenda.

Motion

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

3. INVOCATION DEWEY CYCLONE BRETT

4. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

5.1. Ms. Kari McMichael of 710 Pine Ridge Road addressed two topics, the Convenience Center and vehicle traffic. She said with two curbside residential pickups a week she questioned the trash drop-off at the Convenience Center. There are also the county dumps where people can bring their trash. With the garbage options she questioned keeping the center open, maybe it should only be for recycling, said Ms. McMichael.

Ms. McMichael commented on the traffic congestion problems generated from the Ski Resort. We could make all available parking lots on the mountain pay-for-parking lots. It is a safety issue, and a planning issue and people are frustrated. She also said we should post signs that no walkers are allowed on the highway.

Mr. Noel McMichael of 710 Pine Ridge Road read a report on wildlife chronic wasting disease. It stated that CWD is contagious among the deer populations. The report explained the cause of infections and spread among wildlife. In October of 2022, CWD was found in Watauga County. Mr. McMichael noted that a deer policy would address the effect of the disease on our area and might correct behaviors.

Mr. Robert McMichael of 710 Pine Ridge Road addressed the January budget retreat which was live streamed. Mr. McMichael was concerned with the Town's fund savings and lowering taxes. We should not be spending money. He said we need a baseline budget for staff expenses and set the tax rate for necessary expenses, then spend on additional cost.

Ms. Judy Elliot of 105 Teaberry Lane supported approving the Town Hall/ Visitor Center expansion project. She said the project will improve the Police facilities and bring the building and equipment up to date. The TDA is supporting the project and should be spending \$900,000. The need for police is important. The Visitor Center needs improving for marketing and tourism.

6. **CONSENT AGENDA**

- 6.1. Adoption of Minutes
- 6.2. 2023 Financial Audit and Financial Statement Preparation
- 6.3. Financial Director's December Report
- 6.4. Amending of the FY 2023 Budget Ordinance
- 6.5. Board meeting calendar schedule TDA change request
- 6.6. Tax Release & Refunds

Motion

Kelly Melang made a motion to approve the consent agenda items: Adoption of Minutes January 10, 2023, Financial Audit and Financial Statement Preparation contract with C. Randolph CPA, Financial Director's December Report, FY: 2023 Budget Ordinance Amendment, Updated Council and Boards

Meeting Calendar Schedule 2023, Tax Release and Refunds and Weidner Abernethy seconded the motion. CARRIED. unanimously.

7. OLD BUSINESS

7.1. Parks and Recreation Committee Vacant Seat

Mayor Kaufman requested a nomination to fill a resigned term on Parks and Recreation.

Councilmember Melang nominated Kathy Bubash to fill the term expiring December 2024.

Motion

Kelly Melang made a motion to appoint Kathy Bubash to the Parks and Recreation Committee and Weidner Abernethy seconded the motion. CARRIED. unanimously.

7.2. Approve Bid for Town Hall / Visitor Center Project

Mayor Kaufman opened the discussion of the Town Hall/Visitor Center Expansion Project, and Councilmember Melang requested information about the basic costs to maintain the Town Hall facility. Mr. Pudney explained general costs for building upkeep, and the year-to-date project costs during this planning stage over the past two years. He described the condition of the facility noting the numerous roof leaks and facade repairs. The HVAC equipment is the original, and it would be approximately a few hundred thousand to maintain the current state of the facility due to needing a new generator and HVAC, roof, and siding. Various parts are failing and there have been no major upgrades to the facility since it was built in 1989. The pedestrian bridge on the second floor is failing, regardless of the planned project renovations to increase the space, we have outgrown the space said Mr. Pudney, necessary improvements include needed increased space.

In response to Councilmember Melang inquiry regarding the employees and the space, Mr. Pudney said staff is doubled up in some instances, for example tax administration and permitting share a space. Some employees are working in closets. Plan review and the architect are working in the kitchen. We can't hire a new position in finance because there is not a space to put the position. Staff and confidential meetings are taking place in an open, semiprivate area due to lack of space. There is not a space for a private meeting such as citizens speaking about their bills or taxes. The Police Department is holding evidence in an office space and security does not meet State standards where necessary. The captain's office houses evidence in boxes and there is no more room.

There are space issues regarding secure storage for receiving and processing future court litigation evidence, weapons, and ammunition storage, 911 system records, and computers should be in a stand-alone facility.

Conversely the Visitor Center averages thousands of monthly visitors, and we are not ADA compliant. Reports are housed in the same open space as the four employees with no privacy to meet businesses or developers. The public interfaces with staff and we cannot provide a conference room. We propose to add separate offices for digital marketing and economic development. We need a radio station voice-over space for the cable TV stations as content is produced by our staff. It is not appropriate to house marketing, welcoming the public, storage, and radio equipment all in one room. An ADA bathroom for families meets basic handicap requirements. The facade and design will match the current aesthetics of the two current buildings. The entrance will be cohesive, and we will gain four spaces in the parking lot.

There was further discussion regarding the facility condition, repairs and expansion, the costs, funds spent on the project, and funding the construction and the current budget. Mr. Pudney explained the finance options, the costs of the project so far, the interest rate projections and the debt service options under option 1) and option 2) as presented to the Council.

Mayor Kaufman requested to call the vote on approval of expansion project and Councilmember Melang voted 'aye' and Councilmember Abernethy voted 'aye'. Vice Mayor Accardi conferencing over the phone expressed his position to continue the matter to a later date.

Mayor Kaufman requested Mr. Pudney to provide Council with the interest rate information, to which Mr. Pudney stated he would work on that immediately on February 15th.

Motion

Kelly Melang made a motion to approve the Town Hall/ Visitor Center expansion project under option 2, buy down amount to be financed with \$500,000.00 fund balance making the financed amount at \$538,231.00 and Weidner Abernethy seconded the motion. CARRIED. unanimously.

8. TOWN MANAGER AND STAFF REPORTS

8.1. Town Manager's Report

Mr. Pudney reviewed the status of the various projects:

- Lake Coffey Water Reservoir project update regarding the 99-year lease with the Ski Resort and the water capacity agreement
- Grants and FEMA Funding and General Obligation Bond Process
- State Representative Meeting February 21st in Raleigh - Governor's Office representative pre-meeting on February 15th
- Skiloft Road area infrastructure update neighborhood meeting 2/28/2023 at 4:00 p.m.
- Pinnacle Ridge Water Well

- Employee Pay Plan MAPS Group Analysis presented at March 14, 2023 Council meeting

Mr. Pudney addressed the traffic issues and accidents, noting that the town is working with the ski resort holding weekly meetings, signage and Police Department parking enforcement and mitigation is on-going as well as the TDA has reduced marketing and advertising on weekends emphasis is now on the weekdays.

There was a discussion regarding amending the camping rules at Shane Park. Currently no vehicles are allowed. Camper vans with tent pop-ups were addressed. Parks and Recreation do not allow the vans and Town Council may change the policy with an amendment. There is currently no connections allowing popups with the tents. Mayor Kaufman was not in favor of changing the policy. Allowing the vans opens up a change to Shane Park he said. Councilmember Abernethy thinks it is a good idea to allow pop-ups. Vice Mayor Accardi would like to know what Dr. and Mrs. Shane wish to see for the park. Mr. Pudney said there are seven tent campsites. Parks and Recreation Staff will learn what the Shanes' think.

In order to change our representative on the Watauga Economic Development Council, the change from the Mayor to Councilmember Abernethy requires a motion and a vote. Currently Mayor Kaufman is appointed.

Motion

Kelly Melang made a motion to appoint Councilmember Abernethy to the Watauga Economic Development Council and Barry Kaufman seconded the motion. CARRIED. unanimously.

- 8.2. Fire Department Monthly Report
- 8.3. Police Department Monthly Report
- 8.4. January 2023 Recreation Report
- 8.5. TDA Report February 2023
- 8.6. DOI Monthly Report
- 8.7. Planning and Inspections Report 2023-01

9. TOWN COUNCIL COMMENTS

- 9.1. Councilmember Melang addressed the budget process as Town Council is currently working on goals and flushing out ideas. She warned of social media misinformation. No decisions are made regarding the budget. Citizens are encouraged to run for office in July. Ms. Melang clarified that the TDA is paying for the Visitor Center expansion portion of the Town Hall/ Visitor Center project. The 'cardboard box derby' at the sled hill is scheduled for February 17, 2023.

Ms. Sandy Carr requested to address Council and discussed the Town Hall/Visitor Center Expansion Project and the TDA. The next TDA meeting is February 21, 2023 at 9:00 a.m.

Councilmember Abernethy wanted to address the town's control over the aesthetic look of buildings. He was in favor of setting standards. He produced a photo of a home that is a metal building with windows, which could bring down property values. The resolution before Council last month addressed the need for setting standards.

Vice Mayor Accardi requested a Town Hall meeting and said the topic is to be the annual budget. At the budget retreats the public do not speak so this is for the public to talk to the Council and for financial education of town business.

Mayor Kaufman said he appreciates the TDA board support for the Visitor Center expansion project and for the members voting on issuing \$600,000 as a contribution to the center. He looks forward to working with the new board. Mayor Kaufman said he listened to the meeting, and this is a help towards the expansion project. The meeting was positive, and the board is moving forward.

Mayor Kaufman requested a motion to go into closed session.

Motion

Kelly Melang made a motion to move to executive session pursuant to 143-318.11 (a)(3) & (a)(6) and Weidner Abernethy seconded the motion. CARRIED. unanimously.

10. CLOSED SESSION - PURSUANT TO NC GS 143-318.11 (A)(3) ATTORNEY CLIENT MATTERS AND (A) (6) PERSONNEL MATTERS

10.1. Mayor Kaufman requested a motion to reconvene to the regular meeting and Councilmember Melang motioned to reconvene to the regular meeting and Councilmember Abernethy seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Mayor Kaufman requested a motion to either approve or deny the budget allocation for the closed session subject property Acquisition to the maximum amount of \$280,000.

Motion

Weidner Abernethy made a motion to approve the budget allocation for the subject property Acquisition in maximum amount of \$280,000 and Kelly Melang seconded the motion. CARRIED. unanimously.

11. ADJOURNMENT

11.1. There being no further business, Mayor Kaufman requested a motion to adjourn at 6:25 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