

Minutes
Spruce Pine Town Council
Monday, December 14, 2020

A meeting of the Town Council was held on December 14, 2020. Present were Mayor Darla Harding and Council Members James Acuff, Jackie Rensink and Larry McKinney. Staff in attendance included Richard Canipe, Darlene Butler, Crystal Young, and Billy Summerlin. Others attended, including Nealy Andrews, Rocky Branch, Dave Whitson, John Boyd, Matt Miller, Alex Glover, Lloyd Hise, Jr., and Juliana Walker (Mitchell New-Journal).

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Darla Harding called the regular meeting to order at 5:30 PM. Jackie Rensink gave the invocation. James Acuff led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Larry McKinney moved to approve the agenda with the addition of an appointment for Nealy Andrews of TRAC at 5:40 PM. Jackie Rensink seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Jackie Rensink moved to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of November 09, 2020. James Acuff seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

ACTION AGENDA

James Acuff moved to adopt General Fund Budget Ordinance Amendment #1. Jackie Rensink seconded the motion, which carried with four in favor. Said ordinance is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes.

James Acuff moved to release 2020 property taxes for Rush Truck Leasing in the amount of \$246.54. Jackie Rensink seconded the motion, which carried with four in favor. Said release is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes.

Larry McKinney moved to adopt the Resolution of Tentative Award for the Sewer Rehabilitation Project. James Acuff seconded the motion, which carried with four in favor. Said resolution is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes.

FINANCE

Finance Officer Crystal Young presented a property tax discovery for Johnson Fleet Service for business personal property in the amount of \$716.68. An Analysis of Current Year Tax Levy through 11/30/20 was presented, with the tax collection percentage at 36.8%. Crystal presented financial reports through November 30, which are incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes.

PUBLIC COMMENT- none

APPOINTMENT

- Nealy Andrews, of Toe River Arts Council, thanked the Council for their support of TRAC. She updated them on TRAC's accomplishments during the year, and the challenges for local artists during the pandemic.
- Dr. Rocky Branch, pastor of First Baptist Church of Spruce Pine, updated the Town Council on a water drainage problem at Tappan Street that he feels is the cause of a sink hole and damage to the First Baptist Church parking lot. He asserted that the water coming on the property is not the church's water, and requested that the Town help with the cost of repairs, which he projects to be \$64,397 for that section of the problem. Town Manager Richard Canipe noted that maps from as early as 1923 show that Summit and Tappan Streets existed well before the church acquired the property and connected drainage to the state tiles. The Town of Spruce Pine did not create the problem. The church tiled the gully that carried the water with materials that typically last 20 years. Engineer Alex Glover advised that the tile would be probed in January by a contractor. Council tabled the issue until January.

PUBLIC HEARING

Mayor Darla Harding opened a public hearing to solicit and receive public comment regarding a proposed appropriation from the general revenues of the Town of Spruce Pine for economic development. The Town Council is considering an appropriation in an amount of not more than one hundred thousand dollars to assist Mayland Community College in the cost

of ongoing repairs, renovations and improvements to Pinebridge Inn in Spruce Pine. Mayland Community College owns Pinebridge Inn and the adjacent Pinebridge Coliseum.

- Dr. John Boyd thanked the Town Council. He noted that Mayland Community College is engaged in a big project with big economic push. He described the impact of the combined hotel, coliseum and planetarium on Spruce Pine and Mitchell County. He advised that the \$100,000 he is requesting would enable the hotel's second floor to open in May, and that he has the ability to get the funds matched right now. He also stated that this is the last year he will ask for funds.
- Attorney Lloyd Hise, Jr. updated the Council on the tax impact of the hotel. He advised that the property is owned by a 501C-3 agency, but that if the purpose of the building is not charitable, the property is subject to property taxes. The hotel will not be used as a charity, so taxes will be paid to the Town.
- Zan Sistare reiterated the amount of local work generated by the hotel and coliseum renovations. He commended the practice of putting old buildings back in play downtown.
- David Whitson, of Whitson Electric Company, stated that the hotel has new electrical and fire alarm systems, and that he has received the contract for heating all the rooms.
- Dr. John Boyd reminded the Council that Mayland is working as their own contractor. He anticipates drawing crowds of 500-1500 on most weekends when the Coliseum opens. He has been heavily marketing the community statewide. Council Member James Acuff asked Dr. Boyd if he planned to remain at Mayland to see this project through. Dr. Boyd expressed his commitment to the project.

With no further comments, Mayor Harding closed the public hearing.

MAYOR/COUNCIL REQUESTS / COMMENTS

- Jackie Rensink moved to appropriate \$100,000 to Mayland Community College for renovations of the former Pinebridge Hotel. James Acuff seconded the motion, which carried with four in favor.
- Mayor Harding asked if the ABC Board could include a council member. Attorney Hise will advise. He noted that he plans to retire at the end of 2021.

TOWN MANAGER

- ✓ Town Manager Richard Canipe updated the Council on the grant application to the Golden Leaf Foundation submitted with Mitchell County through the Economic Development Commission. The project is to replace the water line from Rogers Street to McDonald's along Highway 226S. The replacement of this line would allow for more growth and fire protection along that corridor. We have been invited to file a full application, which is a good step. The town match would be \$100,000. High Country Council of Governments is working on the full application.
- ✓ Richard requested that the Council consider paid lunch breaks for all hourly town employees. James Acuff moved to pay all remaining hourly staff for lunch. Larry McKinney seconded the motion, which carried with four in favor.
- ✓ Richard presented a request from Robert and Heather Hall for assistance with a bill for a sewer problem that might have been avoided if the Town had videoed the sewer line when the problems arose. As the bill includes replacement of the line from the street to the house, a portion of the line that the property owner is responsible for, Council agreed to pay one half of the balance on the Burleson Plumbing account. James Acuff moved to pay 1/2 toward the Burleson's bill. Larry McKinney seconded the motion, which carried with four in favor.
- ✓ Larry McKinney stated that he has been getting complaints from downtown businesses that there is no police presence downtown. Richard Canipe stated that he and Darlene Butler had met with Police Chief Bill Summerlin earlier Monday regarding increased patrols downtown and residentially, as well as the placing of cards in business doors. The Chief will address these issues. Richard strongly suggested to Council that individual members should call dispatch for officers and not individual cell phones.

ADJOURNMENT

With no additional discussion, Larry McKinney moved to adjourn the meeting.

Darlene Butler
Darlene Butler, Town Clerk/Manager

Darla Harding, Mayor

Larry McKinney, Mayor Pro Tem

absent
Rocky Buchanan, Council Member

James Acuff, Council Member

Jackie Rensink, Council Member