

**Minutes
Spruce Pine Town Council
Monday, February 8, 2021**

A meeting of the Town Council was held on February 8, 2021. Present were Mayor Darla Harding and Council Members Rocky Buchanan, James Acuff, and Jackie Rensink. Staff in attendance included Darlene Butler, Shelley Buchanan, Phillip Hise, Crystal Young, Libby Phillips, Bill Summerlin, and Michael Wood. Others attended, including Russell Lankford, Tim Kearns, T.J. Kearns, Chris Boone, Alex Glover and Juliana Walker (Mitchell News-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

Rocky Buchanan moved to approve the agenda as presented. James Acuff seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Jackie Rensink moved to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of December 14, 2020. James Acuff seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Police Department

- Police Chief Billy Summerlin updated the Council on the new police vehicles that have been purchased as well as morale in the department. He advised one of the new Dodge Durango's will be here next week and the other new Dodge will be here the week after. He stated the department is running well despite losing Officer Courtney Beam to PRC. He also elaborated that the department will look at hiring a new officer in the future but for now the PD is running smoothly with the help of reserve officers.
- Chief Summerlin said the primary focus of the department right now is addressing unregistered vehicles and junk cars inside the city limits. He also wants his officers to have more of a presence in the community. Overall he is happy with the way things are going in his department and asked if there is anything the Council would like or need his department to do.
- Council Member Jackie Rensink stated she is getting a lot of good comments and positive feedback from the community concerning the Police Department's presence in town and around the local businesses especially after hours. She added how appreciative the business owners are to receive the door check cards left at businesses by the officers.
- Town Manager Darlene Butler commended Chief Summerlin for his energetic and positive presence in the community.

Main Street

- Main Street Director Libby Phillips distributed and presented the Spruce Pine Main Street Director's Report, which is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes.
- Mayor Darla Harding asked what the intentions were for the buildings in town purchased by Michael Vance. Libby stated it is her understanding he wants to put businesses in the lower part of the buildings and residential uses for the upstairs.

Public Works

- Public Works Director Phillip Hise distributed 84 closed work orders for the month of January.
- Phillip advised the Council it had been an extremely busy few months with two major water leaks and several small leaks. He noted that he is on his fifth load of salt this winter due to the number of inclement weather situations we have had so far. He also made the Council aware of the toll this has taken on his equipment. He is currently down one snow plow and two salt spreaders due to repairs and hope to have them back and operational soon.
- Mayor Harding expressed her appreciation for all the employees in the Public Works department working tirelessly through a major water leak and pushing snow last weekend.

Water & Sewer

- Veolia Project Manager Russell Lankford distributed and presented the Veolia Monthly Operations Report for September, which is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes.
- In response to questions from Council Member James Acuff, Russell answered that the wells service the Grassy Creek area. High levels of iron and manganese, while not dangerous, noticeably color water. Well #2 has been shut down for the last month while testing levels of these minerals.

Parks & Rec

- Parks Supervisor Michael Wood updated the Council on park work over the last few months. He advised they mowed through November then started on winter projects. He talked about the college kids starting to get back to work and the staffing challenges that came with Covid and quarantines.
- The current projects happening with the department are the remodel of the bathrooms at Brad Ragan Park done by Miller Construction. He is getting price quotes on a new fence/guard rail along the street entering Riverside Park (on the Rotary Playground end).
- Michael shared with the Council the new tennis court resurfacing proposal. The proposal cost for this project is \$62,193.00. Michael stated that he would be looking into grant funding but did not feel the department could afford this cost to resurface the tennis courts.
- Rocky Buchanan asked if the tennis courts are used regularly, to which Michael responded there are a few regulars that play and Mayland Early College. He also stated that the nearest tennis courts would be at Mountain Heritage High School and Avery County High School. He mentioned that Pickle Ball is becoming a more popular sport. He suggested a Dog Park be installed where the back two tennis courts are currently. Mayor Harding commented that she has heard a lot of interest in the community about a dog park.
- Rocky Buchanan recommended we look into something more durable than wood to replace the fence at Riverside Park due to the life span of wood.
- Michael's final comments to the Council were for them to start thinking about whether the Town is going to open Brad Ragan pool this year and if we are going to begin doing shelter reservations in light of loosened Covid restrictions.

Finance

- Finance Officer Crystal Young presented December and January financial worksheets for the general and water/sewer funds. She also presented a letter drafted to the LGC concerning the Town showing a loss on the Town's audited financial statements for the water/sewer fund. The letter highlights the analyzation and adjustments to the water and sewer rates over the last four years. She noted that our water and sewer fund operates at a profit when depreciation is not considered.
- Mayor Harding asked if water bills are being paid and in a timely manner due to the ongoing pandemic. Crystal responded that for the most part our customers have kept on top of their water/sewer bills but that we have resumed disconnections and assessing late fees.
- Council Member Rocky Buchanan asked if we had received the Covid Relief funds, to which Crystal replied we have received those funds.

PUBLIC COMMENT- none

ACTION AGENDA

Rocky Buchanan moved to provide water at outside rates with no annexation to Charles D. Savell, at Pack Drive Lot #3. James Acuff seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Crystal Young presented Budget Amendment #2 to the Council. This amendment to the General Fund included an increase in appropriations to Mayland Community College of \$100,000 and paid lunch hours for the Police Department and Public Works. Rocky Buchanan made a motion to adopt the Budget Amendment #2. Jackie Rensink seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. Said budget amendment is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes.

APPOINTMENTS

- Alex Glover attended the meeting representing Dr. Rocky Branch and First Baptist Church. He started by sharing the concerns about the sink hole in the church's parking lot. He shared photos taken by a contractor with the Council showing a bad connection and rocks and debris inside the pipe causing the bank to cave in under the bell tower. Mr. Glover stated that this is due to work done in 2016 by James Phillips for the Town. Mayor Harding stated that this work was done correctly on the Town's side and that it was warned loudly to the church that they would eventually have problems if the pipe was not repaired on their side. The church is asking that the Town

help in covering the cost of repairs necessary to fix this problem. The Council agreed to set up a meeting with everyone involved in the work done in 2016 to get more clarity on the situation.

- Tim Kearns attended tonight's meeting to revisit the proposed mountain bike trail at Brad Ragan Park. Mr. Kearns provided the Council Members with a copy of the project description, site plan, and cost estimate, which is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes. James Acuff asked about the liability that falls on the Town for the project. Town Manager Darlene Butler responded that she has checked with the insurance company and as long as the track/trail is a beginner level type course it would be covered. T.J. Kearns added that this track will be used mostly by kids and will only require a bike with a wider tire than a normal bicycle. Mayor Harding suggested that the Town apply for a PARTF grant to fund this project and several other upgrades needed in the Parks and Rec Department. It was discussed that we move forward with installing the Pump Track part of this project and then apply for the PARTF grant for the mountain bike trail. The cost of the Pump Track is \$15,000. Chris Boone volunteered to donate \$5,000 and Tim Kearns also pledged \$5,000. Jackie Rensink moved to give the remaining \$5,000 needed to install the Pump Track. James Acuff seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. Crystal Young will be researching the grant requirements.

TOWN MANAGER

- ✓ Town Manager Darlene Butler shared that the Chamber met and voted unanimously to move forward with the Mineral and Gem Show scheduled this year from July 29- August 1.
- ✓ The sewer line rehabilitation preconstruction meeting for Hwy 19E (Biggerstaff Hill) and Locust Ave is being held tomorrow.
- ✓ The Golden Leaf grant at the EDC is almost ready to be submitted and is due by February 11th.
- ✓ Darlene advised the Council that 130 of Chatham, LLC is interested in purchasing the property owned by the Town on Stroup Rd. The Council discussed and decided unanimously they are not interested in selling the property at this time due to future plans.
- ✓ Darlene reminded the Council of the joint meeting to be held at Mitchell County Commissioners Meeting next week.
- ✓ Miller Contracting is waiting on a period of more favorable weather to begin the sidewalks on Topaz St due to indentations.
- ✓ The Capital Improvement Plan with Withers- Ravenel is continuing and almost ready to wrap up.
- ✓ Darlene mentioned she is in discussion with Tommy Winchester about the cleanup of the home that burned on South Dale St.
- ✓ Darlene presented the Council with a resolution in support of de-annexation of the Grassy Creek watershed property owned by 130 of Chatham, LLC. This resolution is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes. Jackie Rensink moved to approve the resolution to de-annex the Grassy Creek watershed. James Acuff seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

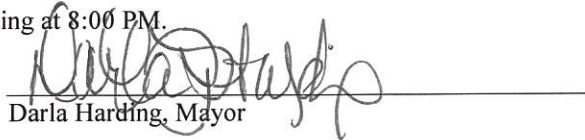
MAYOR/COUNCIL REQUESTS / COMMENTS

Mayor Harding asked the Council for a solid list of potential members of the newly created Appearance Standards Committee. They all agreed to continue to search for a realtor to serve on this committee. James Acuff asked for a job description for these committee members.

ADJOURNMENT

Jackie Rensink moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:00 PM.


Shelley Buchanan, Town Clerk


Darla Harding, Mayor

Absent
Larry McKinney, Mayor Pro Tem


Rocky Buchanan, Council Member


James Acuff, Council Member


Jackie Rensink, Council Member