

**Minutes
Spruce Pine Town Council
Monday, April 12, 2021**

A meeting of the Town Council was held on April 12, 2021. Present were Mayor Darla Harding and Council Members Rocky Buchanan, Larry McKinney and Jackie Rensink. Staff in attendance included Darlene Butler, Bill Summerlin, Phillip Hise, Crystal Young, Shelley Buchanan, Libby Phillips and Michael Wood. Others attended, including Jimmy Hinshaw, Luther Stroup, Pat Dale, Zan Sistare, Dr. John Boyd, Chelsea Thayer, Junior Jones, and Sheila Blalock.

CALL TO ORDER

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

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Larry McKinney moved to approve the agenda, with the addition of two appointments for Sheila Blalock and Junior Jones as well as Chelsea Thayer's request for a solicitation permit under Action Agenda. Jackie Rensink seconded the motion, which carried with all present in favor.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Jackie Rensink moved to approve the minutes of the regular meeting held on March 22, 2021. Rocky Buchanan seconded the motion, which carried with all present in favor.

Rocky Buchanan moved to approve the minutes of the closed session meeting also held on March 22, 2021. Jackie Rensink seconded the motion, with carried unanimously.

DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Police Department

- Police Chief Bill Summerlin updated the Council on the police department's efforts to crack down on the buying and selling of prescription drugs in the town. He noted this has become increasingly difficult in light of the stimulus checks that have been issued in recent weeks.
- Chief Summerlin shared that he has been conducting interviews for a new officer in the department and that they will be voting on this new addition soon.
- He mentioned he is still working on getting individuals who have community service hours to fulfill to serve that time in the Town of Spruce Pine.
- He then advised the council they have been working to address the issues at three properties that were brought to their attention on Reservoir Rd, Pitt Rd, and Oak Ave. He has also been in contact with Republic Services to empty/maintain the dumpster on the new bypass bridge going towards Bakersville.

Parks & Rec

- Michael Wood presented his report for Parks and Recreation, which is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes.
- Mayor Harding asked if he had implemented the new shelter reservation rates and if there had been complaints. Michael responded that he has put this increase in effect and so far the public has been very understanding.
- He then thanked the Council for their decision to increase his salary and promote him to Parks and Recreation Director.

Public Works

- Phillip Hise presented open and closed work orders for March. He explained that the majority of the work orders have been for brush and yard waste pickup, averaging 15 or more per week. His crew has also been busy cleaning up from the large amount of rain we received over the weekend.
- Rocky Buchanan asked if there is a plan in place for the issues on Berry Street, to which Phillip replied the town attorney has declared we do have a right of way on Oakland Avenue, and now it is a matter of finding the water line on Oakland Ave in order to proceed. The plan is to bring a new water line down from Overlook Dr in order to obtain better water pressure.
- Phillip mentioned he is getting quotes on a new mower for his upcoming budget request, and also for roofing the maintenance shed. The mower they have now is no longer worth the cost to repair it.
- He thanked the Council and asked if there was anything they needed him or his department to work on.

Main Street

- Libby Phillips turned a portion of her time over to Zan Sistare and Dr. John Boyd for an update on the Walking Bridge project and the Pinebridge Inn. Zan began by saying that Covid had delayed this project like so many

others. He advised the bid process should begin in early summer and that it is in the DOT's hands at this point and will hopefully be completed by the end of this year. The biggest hurdle at this time is working with CSX on the train schedule. Dr. Boyd elaborated on the status of the Pinebridge Inn opening. He advised he plans to have a ribbon cutting ceremony before Memorial Day Weekend and then open to the public. He stated he already has rooms booked for the first week in June for a family reunion.

- Libby Phillips then presented the Main Street Director's Report for March, which is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes.
- She brought up a discussion from the last meeting about additional signage downtown. She explained that there was some confusion on the cost of these signs and that the kind of signs they are asking for cost around \$50.00 each not \$5,000. Council member Rocky Buchanan expressed his support of additional signage for the location bathrooms downtown but not for specific businesses. It was the consensus of the council that signage for bathrooms would be a good idea.

Water & Sewer

- Russell Lankford was unable to attend due to quarantine issues within his department. His report is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes.

Finance

- Finance Officer Crystal Young presented the third quarter financials. The tax collection rate is 96.8 %. Said reports are incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes.
- Crystal stated we have received \$1,400.00 in the month of March for back taxes owed due to the NC Debt Setoff Program. April 28th the advertisement will come out in the Mitchell News Journal with the names of individuals and businesses with delinquent taxes.
- She then advised the Council of some updates to the Parks and Rec Master Plan and CIP Plan following suggestions from our Regional Consultant. Jackie Rensink moved to approve the updates to these plans, the motion was seconded by Larry McKinney, and carried with all present in favor. These changes are incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes.
- Town Manager Darlene Butler advised we will have to redo the public hearing held at the last meeting. This is due to the ruling that the public hearing for a PARTF grant can be the only thing on the agenda. She advised the Council this will be done on April 26th, 2021 at 5:00 PM.

APPOINTMENTS

Luther Stroup attended the meeting on behalf of the Kiwanis Club to discuss a Fourth of July Parade. He indicated he wanted the advice of the Council as to what day this should be held. Town Manager Darlene Butler stated she is working on fireworks but is having issues getting this scheduled as our previous fireworks vendor is no longer in business. She went on to say that Aaron Young may be able to shoot the fireworks on Monday after the fourth and we have one other option to try for Saturday the 3rd. Mr. Stroup elaborated that the Kiwanis Club wanted this parade to be a celebration after a very trying year with the ongoing pandemic. They plan to have the parade filled with mostly trucks from local businesses across the area in support of their hard work and dedication to the area. The Council was excited for this event and will be in touch with Mr. Stroup regarding the fireworks display.

Pat Dale attended the meeting on behalf of Mr. Tim Sweeny. Mr. Dale asked if the Council would be willing to sell a piece of property along the river, on Stroup Rd, to Mr. Sweeny in order to ensure this land be used for a hiking trail and facilities for hikers. Mr. Sweeny's intention is to purchase connecting properties to build hiking trails from the Appalachian Trail through Spruce Pine. It was the consensus of the Council to approach the Town attorney Lloyd Hise with some legalities of this proposal and get back with Mr. Dale. Pat had a second proposal from Mr. Sweeny to the Town of Spruce Pine for consideration. He is interested in giving a parcel of land on Beaver Creek Road back to the Town. This piece of property contains the Beaver Creek dam and is currently in the name of Rocky River Hydro LLC. Mr. Dale explained that Mr. Sweeny has no use for this land and would simply like to return it to the Town. Further discussion with the Town attorney will happen on this proposal as well.

Ms. Sheila Blalock with Mitchell County Transportation attended the meeting requesting a letter of support from the Council for a deviated fixed route through the Town of Spruce Pine. This is for a 100% paid federal grant. It would include 18 months of free rides and would run from 6:00 AM until 9:00 PM five days a week. Mayor Harding and Jackie Rensink loved the idea and want to help make it happen in any way we can. They asked that Darlene Butler draft a letter of support for the grant. Rocky Buchanan asked if Ms. Blalock would report back to the Council three months after it is implemented with an update on the route's success, if awarded the grant.

Local business owner, Junior Jones attended the meeting to request that the no parking ordinance in town not be enforced on Saturday, May 22nd. Mr. Jones and Chief Billy Summerlin plan to have a Cruise In event and would like for registered

vehicles to be able to park anywhere they wish in town in order to draw business to the downtown area for the day. This event will include Classic Cars, Old and New Muscle Cars, Hot Rods, Jeeps, and Motorcycles.

CONSENT AGENDA - none

ACTION AGENDA

Chelsea Thayer attended the meeting on behalf of the Mitchell High School Drama Club to request a Solicitation Permit for a fundraising event on May 1st, 2021. The funds will be used towards a trip to Europe for these students. It was the consensus of the Council to allow this event.

Town Manager Darlene Butler presented the council with a resolution adopting the 2021 update of the Toe River Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan. Rocky Buchanan moved to adopt the resolution. Larry McKinney seconded the motion, which carried with all present in favor. Said resolution is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Jimmy Hinshaw approached the Council to ask permission to hold a "Mini Toe Jam" Festival on Saturday, May 29th, 2021. He requested that he be allowed to close the street from Oak Ave to Link St from 5:00 PM until 12:00 AM, as well as the parking lot for the old Carolina Theater from midnight on Friday May 28th until midnight on the 29th. He also asked that patrons be able to have alcohol in plastic cups only outside. He explained this open carry permit will help the businesses downtown (Bierdock Brewery, Hef's, and Nikki's Italian Bistro) and no additional alcohol vendors would be brought in. He explained he will be using off duty police officers for security during the festival. Jackie Rensink moved to approve the requests made by Mr. Hinshaw. Larry McKinney seconded the motion, with all present in favor. Mr. Hinshaw also mentioned he is interested in helping the town revitalize Riverside Park and Brad Ragan Park by fundraising and donations. Darlene asked him to stay in communication with the Town on these efforts and to meet with her discuss further.

MAYOR/COUNCIL REQUESTS / COMMENTS

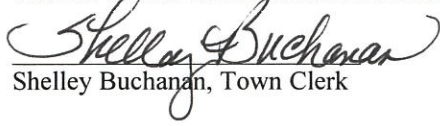
Council member Rocky Buchanan brought up the possibility of leasing the parking lot where the old Toe River Service station is located in order to better control the appearance of the area. The idea was tabled until further discussion at the upcoming budget workshop.

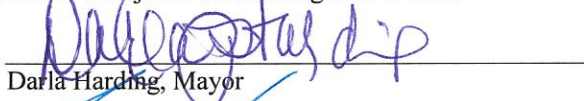
Town Manager

- Darlene presented an offer from Alan Kraus to donate his small parcel of land on Oak Ave to the Town. It was the consensus of the Council that the town has no use for this land and appreciates the offer but will decline at this time.
- Darlene advised the sewer line project on 19E is underway and going very well.
- She shared that Crystal and herself will be on a zoom meeting concerning the Golden Leaf reimbursements in the morning.
- The pump track at Brad Ragan Park is near completion. Mr. Kearns is looking to the Council for suggestions for a naming the track. He suggested Three Peaks Pump Track but asked the Council to think about other possible names.
- Darlene then asked Mayor Harding for a list of member's names and contact information for the new Appearance Standards Committee. Shelley Buchanan will be contacting these individuals to set up the first meeting of this committee.
- Darlene made the Council aware she will be out of the office all next week.
- BRP contacted Darlene about taking part in an Earth Day project. They will be picking up trash along Greenwood Rd that day.
- Darlene requested that Council raise the wage for new Parks and Rec seasonal employees from \$7.25 per hour to \$8.00 per hour, to include a \$.75 raise for current employees that return from previous years. It was the consensus of the Council to agree to this increase.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further discussion Jackie Rensink moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 PM.


Shelley Buchanan, Town Clerk


Darla Harding, Mayor


Larry McKinney, Mayor Pro Tem


Rocky Buchanan, Council Member

Absent

James Acuff, Council Member


Jackie Rensink, Council Member