

Minutes
Spruce Pine Town Council
Monday, June 27th, 2022

A meeting of the Town Council was held on June 27th, 2022. Present were Mayor Darla Harding and Council Members James Acuff, Rocky Buchanan, Larry McKinney and Jackie Rensink. Staff in attendance included Darlene Butler, Shelley Buchanan, Libby Phillips, and Crystal Young. Others attended, including Chad Donnahoo, Kelly Georgeou, Lori McIntyre, Russell Lankford, Wanda Hunt, Betsy Biega, Jennifer Rambo, Tim Kearns, Donna Kearns, Cynthia Nash, Lynn Holler, and Dori Settles.

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 as presented. Jackie Rensink seconded the motion, which carried with all present in favor.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

James Acuff moved to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of May 23rd, 2022. Rocky Buchanan seconded the motion, which carried with all present in favor.

Rocky Buchanan moved to approve the minutes of the public hearing of June 9th, 2022. Jackie Rensink seconded the motion, which carried with all present in favor.

APPOINTMENTS

Dr. John Boyd from Mayland Community College attended the meeting to update the Council on the Blue Ridge Boutique Hotel, the YMCA, and the newly opened Planetarium. He began by saying the Planetarium and Earth to Sky Park that opened over the weekend was a huge success. Mayor Harding shared she was there and that it was amazing. Dr. Boyd noted that the project is Dark Sky Certified and is registering to be affiliated with the Smithsonian Museum and the Museum of Nature and Science. He advised these projects are bringing hundreds of people to our community and that he has used local labor when possible. He shared that the YMCA is moving along very well and will give more updates as he has them. He told the Council the Boutique Hotel has been and will continue to be featured in Our State Magazine. Lynn Holler asked Dr. Boyd if he had all the money needed to complete these projects. He replied that he does not but he has grants and other funding in the pipeline. He also noted that people can tour these locations at any time. Jackie and Darla both thanked Dr. Boyd for his vision and his investment into the community.

CONSENT AGENDA

Town Attorney Chad Donnahoo read aloud the statement of reasonableness regarding the rezoning request by Mr. James Phillips. Jackie Rensink made a motion to adopt the statement of reasonableness. Larry McKinney seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. Said statement is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes.

ACTION AGENDA

Darlene Butler presented the Council with a Memorandum of Understanding between the Town of Spruce Pine and the Spruce Pine Community Enhancement Project, or skateboard park. Darlene told the park group they can move forward with any patching cracks on the tennis court at Brad Ragan Park, which is being renovated into a skateboard park. The attorney noted that the Town should approve any minor updates preceding the Engineer/Architect Plans. Lori asked if the group or the Town would be responsible for repairs to the fence that is there currently. Darla assured her the Council will look into repairing it. Larry McKinney moved to adopt the Phase One Memorandum of Understanding between the Town of Spruce Pine and the Spruce Pine Community Enhancement Project, Inc. James Acuff seconded the motion, which carried unanimously. Said memorandum is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes.

Crystal presented the ARPA Grant Project Ordinance. Said ordinance is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes. Jackie Rensink made a motion to adopt the ARPA Grant Project Ordinance. Larry McKinney seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Crystal presented four ARPA policies drafted by the Institute of Government. Said policies are incorporated by reference and attached to the minutes. Larry McKinney made a motion to adopt the four ARPA policies. Rocky Buchanan seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Crystal presented Budget Ordinance Amendment #3, which will cover the paving of Locust Street along with other items. Said Ordinance is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes. Rocky Buchanan moved to adopt Budget Ordinance Amendment #3. James Acuff seconded the motion, which carried with all present in favor.

Larry McKinney moved to adopt the 2022/23 budget as it stands. James Acuff seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Chad Donnahoo read the statement of reasonableness regarding the Settles' rezoning request of parcel ID #0890-11-65-3126. Larry McKinney made a motion to approve the rezone request. Jackie Rensink seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Betsy Biega attended the meeting to share her and several other citizens' feelings about the new gun and ammo retail store that recently opened on Oak Avenue. She conveyed that she is disappointed and frustrated that this type of business was allowed to open 300 feet from the Spruce Pine Montessori School on Balsam Avenue, especially following the events that took place in the Uvalde, Texas school shooting last month. She went on to say she is also disgusted with the business' logo of a pine tree and an AR15, which she finds grotesque and offensive. She asked the Council if the Town has any say where a gun and ammo store can be opened. She also asked if there was a distance a gun and ammo store had to be from a school. She noted she had spoken to Todd Leoni (the building owner) and he told her the business has signed a three-year lease. Libby Phillips spoke up and said Mr. Leoni told her he is going to ask the store owner to change his logo. Mayor Harding shared Ms. Biega's concerns and strong feelings on the issue. Darla went on to say that she had a conversation with Senator Ralph Hise and the Town has no legal standing to remove the store. Mr. Hise explained to Darla that it is the responsibility of the ATF to do its due diligence before a gun and ammo store can open. Mrs. Biega asked that the Council consider a new ordinance for the future and protection of the children in this community.

Lynn Holler stated that after reading the Town of Spruce Pine Land Use Plan from 2009 she sees that a lot of the struggles identified in that plan are the same struggles the Town is having today. She then asked several questions about the Mitchell County EDC. Darlene answered that a new director has been hired.

MAYOR/COUNCIL REQUESTS / COMMENTS

- ✓ Mayor Harding had a question for Darlene from a citizen concerning the pickle ball court at Brad Ragan Park. She asked if this individual used their own money could they go ahead and make changes to the pickle ball court. Darlene answered that would not be a good idea because work is about to begin to turn that court into two pickle ball courts.

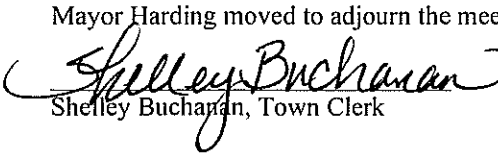
TOWN MANAGER

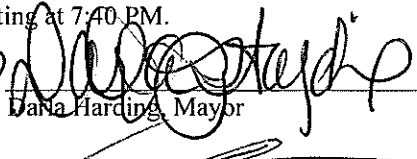
- ✓ Darlene and Russell Lankford addressed the Council concerning commercial waste dumping into city sewer. Darlene presented a report of the history, challenges, and pricing of discharging septage into our wastewater facility. Said report is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes. Russell explained that the Town needs to clarify if and who we allow to dump sewage because the waste treatment plant is subject to danger and expenses of continuing to do this without at least a price increase. Rocky Buchanan added that it's a problem that these individuals do not fill out the proper paperwork when they dump, and also people could dump in areas and the Town would never know. Jackie Rensink asked Russell for his professional opinion on the matter. To which Russell replied that the biggest thing is accountability and the fact that the Town is losing a lot of money. Rocky recommended that the price be increased immediately. It was the consensus of the Council to table the discussion until the next meeting and place it on the Action Agenda.

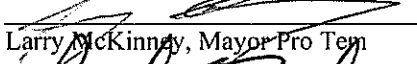
Mayor Darla Harding asked for a motion to enter into a closed session. Larry McKinney made a motion to enter into closed session. Jackie Rensink seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Harding moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:40 PM.


Shelley Buchanan, Town Clerk


Dana Harding, Mayor


Larry McKinney, Mayor Pro Tem


Rocky Buchanan, Council Member


James Acuff, Council Member


Jackie Rehsink, Council Member