

Minutes
Spruce Pine Town Council
Monday, September 12th, 2022

A meeting of the Town Council was held on September 12, 2022. Present were Mayor Darla Harding and Council Members Jackie Rensink, Larry McKinney, and Rocky Buchanan. Staff in attendance included Darlene Butler, Shelley Buchanan, Michael Wood, Billy Summerlin, Russell Lankford and Libby Phillips. Others attended, including Chad Donnahoo, Dori Settles, Cynthia Sciacca, Beverly Askew, Gina Phillips, Marty Smith, Shannon Lee, and Lynn Holler.

CALL TO ORDER

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

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Larry McKinney moved to approve the agenda with the addition of a stormwater planning resolution to be considered. Jackie Rensink seconded the motion, which carried with all present in favor.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Rocky Buchanan moved to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of August 22, 2022. Jackie Rensink seconded the motion, which carried with all present in favor.

APPOINTMENTS

Gina Phillips attended the meeting to solicit the Town's support of a Fall project she is planning called Hilloween. She described the event as a county wide festival born during Covid. Her intention is to promote Mitchell County's culture, history, and folklore. With the help of the UNC School of Arts and Disney designers she plans to have three days of events in different areas of the county, ending the festivities in Spruce Pine. She mentioned her appreciation of Mike Wood helping her with the details of setting up in Riverside Park. The activities include food vendors, crafters, apple butter making, face painting, a pub crawl, storytelling, and dramatizations of Mitchell County legends. The Council was very receptive to the idea and thanked Ms. Phillips for her presentation.

Marty Smith, owner of Appalachian Outhouses in McDowell County, approached the Council concerning the sewage dumping issue being discussed. He noted he has been a reputable business in the area since 1993 and has always dumped the waste from his port-o-johns in the Town's sewer system. He asked that the Council consider grandfathering his business in before they make a final decision on an ordinance. He explained that his business was based in Mitchell County for years until it outgrew the space, at which time it was moved to McDowell County. Appalachian Outhouses currently has 116 customers in Mitchell County. Russell Lankford mentioned the reason for the change in policy is largely due to the cost of processing solids that has increased astronomically. Mayor Harding explained they have a very difficult decision to make and they would take his situation into consideration. Mr. Smith thanked the Council for their time and consideration.

DEPARTMENT UPDATES

Police Dept

- Chief Billy Summerlin gave an update on his department. He said things are going well and he has officers focusing heavily on drugs in the area. The Town has taken possession of a vehicle seized in a drug bust. He is working on getting the paperwork submitted for the Town to take ownership. Billy's focus is on the elderly in the Town and watching out for theft, in particular oil from unlocked barrels and gasoline. He mentioned the growing concern about homeless individuals in Town. He noted there are approximately 30 homeless persons living in the parks and surrounding woods. His main concern is making sure the merchants in Town and citizens are safe. The final trash pickup day for the year is tomorrow at 6:00 and is being led by employees from SECU along the 226 Corridor. Billy is gearing up for Christmas festivities and decorating in Town.

Public Works

- The new Public Works Director, Russell Lankford, gave a report on his department. He began by expressing his gratitude for the opportunity to work for the Town and good people that know him and his family. He noted his first month has been very busy but good. The maintenance crew plans to begin asphalt patching this week. He has two positions available and hopes to have those filled soon. Mayor Harding thanked Russell for accepting the position of director and all of his hard work and dedication to the Town over the years.

Parks & Rec

- Michael Wood presented his Parks and Recreation Director's report for the month of August, which is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes. He asked Darlene to share on Facebook that shelter reservations will be ending soon and they will become first come first served. The parks and rec staff has begun raking the playgrounds for blades, needles and other harmful objects as a homemade knife was found in the rubber mulch recently by a parent.

Main Street

- Libby Phillips presented the Spruce Pine Main Street Executive Director's Report for August, which is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes. Libby reiterated the issue brought up Chief Summerlin about homeless individuals. She said a gentleman has been living in central park for several weeks.

Finance

- Finance Officer Crystal Young was unable to attend the meeting.

Water & Sewer

- No report was given from Veolia.

ACTION AGENDA

- ❖ Darlene presented a resolution for a grant application to the state of North Carolina for stormwater planning and assessment. Said resolution is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes. Larry McKinney made a motion to adopt the Resolution Application for Stormwater Planning. Jackie Rensink seconded the motion, which carried with all present in favor.
- ❖ Darlene presented a resolution for a grant application to the state of North Carolina for a drinking water project. Said resolution is incorporated by reference and attached to these minutes. Larry McKinney made a motion to adopt the modified resolution. Jackie Rensink seconded the motion, which carried with all present in favor.
- ❖ Town attorney Chad Donnahoo drafted a new Special Event Permit Application to be considered as a policy. This is a generic application that can be used by any applicant who wishes to hold an event that requires closure of a city street. Rocky Buchanan made a motion to adopt the Special Event Permit Application. Larry McKinney seconded the motion, which carried with all present in favor.
- ❖ Darlene requested a discussion of the pay scale for the Public Works department. She noted she is pleased to have Russell on board and that she wants to reassess the pay scale in order for him to be able to hire and retain good employees. The recent turn over in the department has been due to employees attaining jobs with better pay. She explained the current pay scale is not at all competitive in today's job market. And although it hasn't been done in recent pay studies we need to consider private industry pay rates. Jackie Rensink agreed this needs to be looked at due to inflation and people being able to provide for their families. Darlene presented her suggestion for a new pay scale which equates to an increase in current budget of \$18,700 including the open positions. Larry McKinney made a motion to adopt this new pay scale. Jackie Rensink seconded the motion, which carried with all present in favor.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Lynn Holler requested the Town do more to celebrate Veterans Day. She suggested flags be hung, a parade, social media post, participation from merchants in town, or a proclamation from the Council. She noted this would show good will on the behalf of the Town by doing more to acknowledge this important day.

Cynthia Sciacca approached the Council about the awareness of a parade commemorating the events of 9/11. She said she wished the Town had been more involved with helping the community remember the events of that fateful day. Mayor Harding thanked Ms. Sciacca for her comments and noted that she will contact the Fire Department for more involvement in the future.

TOWN MANAGER

- ✓ Darlene reported that she and Crystal are working with the HCCOG to make changes to the grant applications in order to help with increasing our scores.
- ✓ She has initiated another grant application with HCCOG after meeting with Withers Ravenel and learning that the 226 waterline project cost has gone from \$875,000 to over \$2,000,000.
- ✓ There have been 4 sets of plans for the new restrooms at Riverside Park given out to potential contractors.
- ✓ Crystal and Darlene attended ARPA training in Hickory.

- ✓ The Land Use Plan Committee will meet for the first time on Thursday September 15th. The first step will be the development of a survey.
- ✓ Darlene presented two quotes from Moretz Paving. It was the consensus of the Council to move forward with the quote of \$35,900 to pave Walnut Ave and use the remainder of the \$50,000 budget to patch the roads in most need.

MAYOR/COUNCIL REQUESTS / COMMENTS

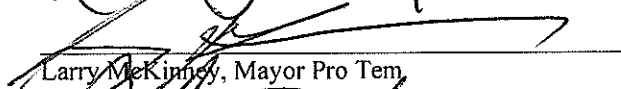
- Darla asked that Darlene and Russell look into an issue with stormwater drainage on Smith Road behind Harris Middle School.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned by motion of Larry McKinney at 7:28 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