

BUDGET WORKSHOP TOWN BOARD

April 11, 2023

Present Mayor George Holleman
Mayor Pro Tem Kenny Poole
Councilman Ronnie Robinette
Councilman Jack Simms
Councilwoman Kim Brown

The budget workshop was opened for business by Mayor Holleman at 10:00 a.m.

Items of Discussion:

1. Councilwoman Brown attended the Mainstreet Conference to get ideas for our downtown area. The application to participate in the NC Downtown Associate Community Program is due by the end of April 2023. It will cost approximately 5 to 6,000.00 for travel related and meeting expenses for the town's representative to participate in the program. Additionally a position will be required to be added to the town staff to be filled at a minimum of part-time by the two year mark of participation in the program. Councilman Simms, Councilman Robinette and Councilman Poole state that they are in favor of the program and applying/completing the application if we would not be committed to the hiring of a staff position but since that is a requirement, then at this time they do not want to complete the application because there are other numerous and more pressing issues that need concentration and funding. This can be re-addressed at a later time.
2. Councilwoman Brown asked about the Town and working with private Business owners and their private property. She stated that in speaking with a business owner who tried to replace the awning on his building and get some front windows replaced that he was told he could not do that and block the front parking spaces for repairs and that the repair people were told to leave. She stated we must be cordial and helpful to business owners trying to improve the appearance of the properties on Main Street and not a hinderance. She asked if gravel had been put down within the last 2 weeks in the back alley on a parking lot behind Main Street? David Odom stated that he did not know about any gravel.
3. Councilwoman Brown met with a representative of the Terracon Group while at the Mainstreet Conference. They are a consulting engineering services firm that helps write grants to provide help with brownfield sites across the state. There are currently \$1.5 billion dollars in grant funding available for help with cleanup of possibly the old hospital, Saunders road junkyard and Grover Bowman MHP. A representative from Terracon will address the Town Board at a future meeting to give more information.
4. The vacant lot between buildings along Main Street being discussed as a soft park was brought up for discussion. The property owners wish to have a contract to show to their attorney since it would be a private/public partnership. Further discussion was tabled due to the expenses projected for the project.
5. Public Works: Utility Manager, Aaron Wike stated that the cemetery is running low on lots for sale. Some trees will need to be contracted to be removed and then the ground smoothed out to make ready for additional lots to be marked off for sale. They will need to be surveyed off. Hopefully the sale of the houses can offset some of the expenses with

the cemetery expansion. Matheson Park was created in 1999 and is 24 years old. The picnic tables need to be replaced due to years of vandalism along with the bathrooms. It is estimated that to upgrade the bathrooms, the water lines will need to be changed from 3/4" to 1 1/2" lines at a cost of \$20,000 or more. Mesh tables are suggested as replacements for the picnic tables along with auto-flush toilets for the bathrooms. The culverts under the road at the park also need to be addressed. Regarding the mowing, he states another p/t person will be needed since we cannot get the inmates back at this time. With the addition of another p/t person, he can shift others to help do other tasks and cut down on contracted work from other sources and do it in-house. The solid waste policy was recently updated and approved by the Town Board. Now we need to get that information to all the town citizens so that they are informed on what we can and cannot pick up. It was also noted that the Town Personnel Policy needs updating. It hasn't been completely updated since 2010.

- 5a. Discussion of the Town Attorney was brought up. Attorney Monroe Panel and his qualifications were discussed. It was also discussed that the WPCOG could help with the search for a Town Attorney. The item will be placed on the agenda for the April 19, 2023 meeting.
6. Public Safety: Councilman Simms asked Police Chief Doug Bowman about the SRO positions at the schools. Chief Bowman stated there are 2 full time officers at the high school and they check in at the student success center. He stated that no one has applied and it's because of the low pay. We are \$10,000 below the starting pay for officers compared to any agency around us. For now, it is worked out for the 2 other schools to be covered like an off duty officer would be at a rate of \$30.00 per hour. 2 officers just went with Taylorsville Elementary on an overnight field trip. Councilman Simms and Councilwoman Brown state the schools need to be protected. Councilman Simms stated for Town Manager Odom to contact the Sheriff to see if that department could cover the schools and to report back at the April 19, 2023 meeting. He stated he asked for the Town Manager to meet with the Sheriff at the last meeting to get pros & cons of a possible consolidation. It does not hurt to get the numbers to see what it would cost. Chief Bowman stated that he could get the positions filled if the starting pay was increased \$10,000.00. Councilman Poole stated that the situation has drug out long enough, that the schools must be covered. Councilman Robinette stated he is not interested in consolidation but it does not hurt to get information. We have to work within our own budget and we cannot be compared to other town's because we don't have the tax base, the other option would be to raise taxes extremely high and no one could afford that. Councilman Poole stated to check with the Sheriff to see if he could assign deputies there in the meantime. Detective Ethan Windsor stated that the cost to the town would be \$198,000 per year if every officer got a \$10,000 pay increase to bring them up to what others make in the Alexander County Sheriff's office and other surrounding agencies. The total would be \$250,000 which would include uniforms, equipment and complete benefits. It would take an additional 8 cent added onto the tax rate to fund the pay increase for the PD.
7. Other Civic Events: Helen Anthony Chestnut representative of the NAACP came before

the Town Board requesting funding for the Juneteenth Celebration. The celebration commemorates the date in history in 1865 when the slaves were freed. The event promotes race relations and promotes solidarity in the community. Councilman Simms suggested a donation of \$1250.00 be given for the Juneteenth Celebration.

- 8. Tax Rate: It was decided that a tax rate be set at .34 for the FY 23-24 budget after much discussion.

Other Topics: The Christmas lights were discussed and what choices may be regarding the repairs being done by Duke Energy. Kathy Estes wants to hold a Memorial Day concert in Matheson Park. More discussion will be held on April 19th, 2023 at the meeting.

With no other business, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 11:50 pm.

Mayor

Councilman

Councilman

Councilman

Councilman

Attest: _____
Yolanda T. Prince, Town Clerk