

**MINUTES OF THE TOWN OF WAYNESVILLE TOWN COUNCIL**  
**Planning Retreat**  
**March 21, 2025**

**THE WAYNESVILLE TOWN COUNCIL** held a special called meeting on Friday, March 21, 2025, at 8:30am in the Rec Center Training Room located at 550 Vance Street Waynesville, NC.

**A. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Gary Caldwell called the meeting to order at 8:40 am with the following members present:

Mayor Gary Caldwell  
Mayor Pro Tem Chuck Dickson  
Councilmember Jon Feichter  
Councilmember Anthony Sutton

The following Councilmembers were absent:

Councilmember Julia Freeman

The following staff members were present:

Rob Hites, Town Manager  
Jesse Fowler, Assistant Town Manager  
Candace Poolton, Town Clerk  
Beth Gilmore, DWC Director  
Olga Grooman, Assistant Development Services Director  
Police Chief David Adams  
Assistant Police Chief Joshua Schick  
Fire Chief Chris Mehaffey  
Public Services Director Ricky Bourne  
Finance Director Ian Barrett  
Grants Manager Charam Miller  
Human Resources Director Page McCurry

Members of the Media:

Paul Nielson, The Mountaineer  
Cory Vaillancourt, Smoky Mountain News

**B. PROJECTED REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES FOR FY 2025-2026**

- Ian Barrett-Finance Director

Finance Director Ian Barrett reported that General Fund balance currently has \$13,923,093 available and the town has reached 73% of the General Fund expenditures, which is on track considering we are 75% of the way through the fiscal year. He said that 63.5% of those funds are available for appropriation, and the town needs 36% available for the best loan rates, so the town is in good standing and still has \$3,327,763 left to appropriate.

Mr. Barrett said that 100.68% of the budgeted ad valorem taxes were collected, and that's at three-quarters of the way through the fiscal year. 76.74% of the town's budgeted revenue has been collected for the year, which is on track.

Mr. Barrett said the Sales Tax Revenue was budgeted for \$4 million, but we've only collected \$2 million, which is 1.2% down from the previous year. He said that is most likely due to Hurricane Helene impacting local businesses.

Mr. Barrett reported that 99.61% of property taxes have been collected, which is great considering the tax rate increase. Councilmember Feichter requested that Mr. Barrett finds out the value of the downtown properties. Mr. Barrett commended the tax collector for bringing the 10-year outstanding tax amount from \$60,500 to \$9,687.09 within a year.

Mr. Barrett reviewed the General Fund Expenditures line by line. He said most of the departments are in line with budgeted expenditures, with the total being 68.42% spent.

Mr. Barrett reviewed the Enterprise Funds. He said the Water, Sewer, and Electric Funds are under expenditures. He added that power purchases were budgeted higher because Santee-Cooper had an enacted a hefty fuel surcharge, but the town has not received the fuel surcharge yet. Councilmember Dickson requested the Fund Balance on the Enterprise Funds.

Mr. Barrett reported that the budget for Fiscal Year 2025-2026 shows an increase in \$1,366,459.55 in the Salaries and Benefits line item that would include a 1% COLA and Career Track. He reported an additional \$1.75 million in capital requested across departments. He said that property and liability insurance will most likely increase because of the hurricane. He said there are some additional mandated increases such as retirement increase. He reminded Council that the Finance Department will be implementing card machines and improving metering infrastructure.

Councilmember Sutton asked Mr. Barrett how he foresees next year in terms of revenue. Mr. Barrett said he prefers to stay on the safe side and recommends keeping revenue and sales tax the same. Councilmember Feichter said there is a \$1.4 million shortfall looking ahead. Mr. Hites said part of that is what they've budgeted in years prior, so they're really looking at a roughly \$500,000K deficit. He emphasized that the retirement increases are considerable and mandated. Mr. Hites said Council has discretion with deciding on capital requests, COLA, and Career Tracks. There was discussion on property re-evaluation which would happen in two years. Mr. Hites reminded Council that the State enacted a moratorium on development, which has affected the town's tax base. He said without the ability to grow, deficits are created. Mr. Hites said the improvements to the Sewer Plant will be operating later this year, but developments will take two to three years to be constructed. He said that other municipalities and counties are in the same boat. Mr. Hites said this is the leanest year he's seen since he's worked for the town. Mr. Hites said budget planning will start in two weeks and should be ready for the first presentation at the first Council meeting in May. He said the staff's goal is to present a budget that has no tax increase and only required utility rate increases. Councilmember Sutton emphasized that Council wants to take care of town employees and Ms. McCurry added the town is very close to being fully staffed. Councilmember Sutton asked for the timeline of receiving

funds from FEMA. Ms. Miller said it could be within 90 days of receiving invoices. Council said it is their goal to have a COLA and Career Track on the next budget.

**C. REPORT ON PROJECTED STORM RECOVERY EXPENSES**

- Page McCurry-Director of Human Resources

Director of Human Resources Page McCurry reported that the total estimated cost of the damages is \$4,683,725, with the hardest hit areas being Parks and Recreation, Public Works, Finance, and fire and police vehicles.

Ms. McCurry said the completed projects include:

- Vance Street Bathrooms (\$6,358 – General Fund)
- Old Armory (\$43,601 – General Fund)
- Pump House (\$104,989 – Water Fund)
- Electric Substation (\$35,665 – Electric Fund)
- 24" Sewer Main (\$242,047 – Sewer Fund)
- 12" Sewer Main (\$24,900 – Sewer Fund)
- Chestnut Walk Development (\$30,000 – Sewer Fund)
- Debris Removal (\$200,000 – General Fund)
- Five Vehicles ( 1 Fire, 4 Police \$126,165 – General Fund)

Ms. McCurry said the current projects underway include:

- Depot Street Bridge \$320,000
- WWTP Bridge \$1,500,000
- Vance St. Softball Field \$325,000
- Dutch Fisher Baseball Field \$410,000
- 5 Greenway Areas \$150,000
- Dog Park \$250,000
- Bi-Lo Pavillion \$75,000
- Bio Retention Area \$20,000
- Wildcat Subdivision \$50,000
- WWTP \$625,000
- Timicua Trail \$95,000
- Watershed (04.11.25) \$50,000

Councilmember Sutton asked if Mr. Kinsland has considered requiring a membership for out of town visitors to use the dog park. He said he can look into it. Ms. Miller said FEMA site visits are scheduled for early April.

Ms. McCurry said the non-FEMA related projects include:

- The HVAC system in Town Hall sustained damages from high wind, causing second-floor humidity and moisture issues. This project will be covered 100% by insurance.
- The finance building sustained damage from high waters and mud. A complete renovation of the building and parking lot is required. This project will be covered 100% by insurance.

Ms. Miller said that FEMA will reimburse insurance deductibles and FEMA should be reimbursing \$500,000 for staff time during the flood.

#### D. REPORT ON GRANT ACTIVITY

- Charam Miller-Grants Manager

Grants Manager Charam Miller reported that they are currently working on:

- CDBG - I (Sewer/Water Replacement) **\$2,976,000**
- Dogwood Trust (Mural) **\$10,000**
- TDA (Heritage Festival) **\$30,000**
- NREL (LEAP) **\$50,000**
- PARTF (Greenway Improvements) **\$232,751**
- GHSP (OT Traffic) **\$11,000**
- DOJ (US Marshalls) **\$9,000**
- DEQ (Stormwater) **\$400,000**
- ARPA (Various Capital Purchases) **\$3,231,910**
- DEQ (WWTP) **\$29,423,000**
- FEMA **\$4,683,725**

She said they were most recently awarded:

- COPS (Community Policing + 2 New Hires) **\$250,000**
- America 250 ( Historical Mural) **\$27,000** Development Services
- Train-up Grant (life-guard training & certification) **\$2,913.25** Parks & Rec

She said they are still waiting on the status of several grants including:

- NCAS Aquatic Grant (Purchase and Install 10 new swim lanes) **\$6,000**
- ORR Rural Recovery (Purchase of outdoor supplies such as tables and benches) **\$10000**
- BRIC (Address critical infrastructure challenges through the proposed conversion of a gravity-fed 24 inch sewer outfall) **\$1,350,000**
- Accessible Parks (Replace center main playground at the Rec Park) **\$250,000**

Ms. McCurry added that she wanted to apply for the Dogwood Health Trust grant in May to continue to provide Crucial Conversations training for staff.

Ms. Miller said that MUNIS will have a grant management component on July 1<sup>st</sup> which will make tracking and reporting much easier.

#### E. REPORT ON RECREATION PROGRAMS AFTER COVID

- Luke Kinsland-Recreation Director

Recreation Director Luke Kinsland reported that revenue is up significantly since 2020. He reminded Council that the Rec Center used to be open on Sundays which could have contributed to the larger revenues pre-Covid. He said they are working toward increasing staffing so they can eventually be open on Sundays again. Mr. Kinsland suggested increasing daily rates and membership rates to remain competitive with other area

fitness centers. He reported that the Rec Center attendance used to be 70% non-residents and 30% residents, but not it's 75% non-residents and 25% residents. Mr. Kinsland said attendance has been down compared to the years before Covid, and they've not been seeing as many requests from schools and day camps either. He explained that staffing continues to be an issue when it comes to attracting schools and day camps. Mr. Kinsland suggested increasing non-resident fees. He explained that Memberships, Rentals, Summer Camp/After School, and Contractual Sports Leagues Expansion brings in the most revenue. Mr. Kinsland presented the highlights of each department:

Aquatics:

- Increased staffing and SMAC membership.
- Increased birthday party offerings
- More programs to offer-kayaking, swim lessons, swim meets, and aqua fitness classes.

Athletics:

- More pickleball offerings
- Increased greenspace rentals
- Hosting more volleyball groups
- AYSO soccer
- Renewal of tennis court rentals, Haywood County basketball, and adult softball leagues

Fitness:

- Increased instructor pool
- Revamped spin class program
- Increased variety of class offerings
- Re-introduction of guest speaker luncheons
- New cardio machines
- Silver Sneakers classes

Programs:

- Tripled afterschool attendance since 2022
- Expanding summer camp program for Summer 2025
- Enhanced Basecamp experiences
- Staffing Expansion
- More camp offerings (Halloween, Homeschool PE, Hurricane Relief Camp, Snow Day Camps)

Maintenance:

- Drainage improvements to the All-Abilities Playground
- New work truck
- New industry standard picnic tables
- Purchase of electric blowers
- Developing turf management program
- LED lighting in Rec Center
- Roofing and interior ceiling repairs at the Armory

Councilmember Feichter suggested electric equipment purchase guidance. Mr. Kinsland said they would have to factor in outfitting the maintenance shop with electric infrastructure.

Mr. Kinsland outlined several challenges his department is facing, including part-time staffing issues, many capital improvement projects needed (tennis courts, treadmills, replacing wooden playground structure, neighborhood park improvements and replacing aging restroom infrastructure). Mr. Kinsland said they've

received grants to help fund greenway trails, stream clean up, and neighborhood parks and they are in the process of applying for several more.

**F. REPORT ON PUBLIC SERVICE ACTIVITY**

- Ricky Bourne-Director of Public Services

Director of Public Services Ricky Bourne reported that he has 25 years in local government experience. He said the Public Works Department is organized into eight divisions: Administration, Asset Services, Electrical Distribution, Water Treatment, Wastewater Treatment, Water Distribution and Wastewater Collection, Streets, Solid Waste, and Stormwater, and Fleet Maintenance. Mr. Bourne said he is looking forward to improving the department’s organization by creating a Mission, Vision, and Values. He said his goal is to be more strategic instead of reactionary and hopes to guide the change process, but he needs support from Council and staff. He said his goals include departmental restructure, developing an annual plan, provide a monthly progress report, launce a team-building process, develop procedures, process, and policy, and create an environment of accountability.

**G. REPORT ON POLICE SOCIAL WORKER PROGRAM**

- Police Chief David Adams

Police Chief David Adams reported that he worked with the Sylva Police Department to establish the social worker program. He said Social Worker Programs started during COVID to help law enforcement with Community Care. He said there are now seven agencies in NC utilizing social workers. Chief Adams said the WPD social worker does ride alongs, puts together information packages for non-profit organizations and community members, and follows up with DV victims and anyone else in the community who may need assistance, including helping people find housing for people. Chief Adams recommended that Council fund a social worker position on staff full-time position instead of just a paid internship. Fire Chief Mehaffey said they could utilize a social worker as well.

**H. DISCUSSION OF “BUDGET BILLING” (AVERAGE BILLING)**

- Councilmember Feichter

Councilmember Feichter proposed offering an average billing option to Waynesville electric customers to help alleviate bill spikes during especially cold months. He said this “budget billing” program would align with best practices for other local power producers. Mr. Barrett said he liked the idea and suggested that the customer must have 12 months of established service, no returned checks, and no late fees to be eligible. He said that if the customer overpaid for the year, their account would get a credit, and if they underpaid, they would have to pay the remainder at the end of year. Mr. Barrett also suggested having an application window (like open enrollment) to alleviate strain on staff. He said that customers could expect notifications of their average monthly bill amount at the same time every year.

***A motion was made by Councilmember Feichter, seconded by Councilmember Dickson, to direct to staff explore implementing average billing. The motion passed unanimously.***

## I. REPORT ON STREET PATCHING/PAVING SCHEDULE

- Mayor Gary Caldwell

Public Services Director Ricky Bourne presented the paving and pothole repair schedule for 2025. He said the schedule is based on the paving survey, the Powell Bill, and priority. Mr. Bourne requested that Council gets him their list of potholes they would like to see fixed before the April Council meeting.

## J. PRESENTATION OF SOLAR PROJECTS

- Mayor Pro Tem Dickson and Councilmember Feichter

Councilmember Dickson presented the estimate by Rhino Renewables for solar panels on the Recreation Center and Public Works building. He said they use a ballast system so installation won't mess up the roof or void the roof's warranty. Councilmember Feichter said the system cost for the Rec Center is estimated to be \$588,336, and there are incentives totaling \$176,500.80, so the project would cost \$411,835.20. He said the projected annual energy savings would total \$38,197.31, or an annual electric offset of 59%. Councilmember Feichter said the town would break even after 10 years. Councilmember Dickson said the town could finance \$411,835.20 through Mountain Bizworks with a 2.9% loan for 10 years (payments being \$3960/month for 10 years, but with savings, it would cost \$760/month). He said the Rec Center needs a new roof in five years, so they would have to pay to replace the roof now. He said if they financed the roof now, alongside the solar panels, the monthly cost would be \$1700/month. Councilmember Feichter asked Council to move forward with preparing an RFP and doing extensive research into financing possibilities. Councilmember Dickson said the Rec Center could be used as a resilience hub if it had solar.

Councilmember Feichter said the system cost for the Public Services building is estimated to be \$159,264, and there are incentives totaling \$47,779.20, so the project would cost \$111,484.80. He said the projected annual energy savings would total \$7,734.60 which would cover 100% of the power usage.

Councilmember Feichter reminded Council of the Resolution they passed that said the town would do their part to achieve 100% renewable energy sources by 2050. Mr. Hites recommended that Council start with solar panels on the Public Services building and then going to Rec Center, which would be a larger project. Councilmember Dickson expressed concern about incentives going away.

Councilmember Dickson said the Chairman of the ESB has offered to donate six Level 2 EV Chargers to the town to be installed near the Mountain Creek Apartments and tennis courts.

***A motion was made by Councilmember Dickson, seconded by Councilmember Feichter, to request town staff to prepare RFPs for both solar projects, to investigate loan opportunities, and to investigate more fully the cost savings that would be possible to achieve. Councilmembers Dickson, Feichter, and Sutton voted in the affirmative. Councilmember Freeman voted against. The motion passed.***

Councilmember Freeman said she is in favor of the investigation, but not for documents to be turned in immediately. Mr. Hites said they will have to engage an engineer to develop the RFP.

## **K. REPORT ON RECREATION MASTER PLAN- PROGRESS TO DATE AND FUTURE PLAN**

- Luke Kinsland, Recreation Director

Recreation Director Luke Kinsland reported that the original Master Plan was adopted in 2017. He mentioned that with this Master Plan, the topography was not factored in, so there are things on the plan that cannot go in the proposed place because of the topography. Mr. Kinsland said the following has been implemented by within the current Master Plan:

- Skatepark lighting - \$7,000
- Dog park improvements - \$70,000
- Neighborhood park improvements at Sulphur Springs and East St Park (\$10,000). Additional park added, Obama-King Park.
- Obama-King Park Restrooms - \$120,000
- Rec Park Restrooms - \$180,000
- Greenway Connection at Mtn Creek Apartment's - \$90,000 (TDA Grant)
- Resurface Tennis Courts - \$54,000

Mr. Kinsland said the following was implemented outside of the current Master Plan:

- Pool dehumidification system - \$800,000. \$88,665/year
- Schulhofer Property Improvements to date – \$563,100
  - Grant amount: \$232,750. Match: \$232,751
  - Pedestrian Bridge: \$380,000
  - Paved trail (to be redone): \$160,000
  - Outdoor exercise equipment: \$16,000
  - Picnic tables & grills: \$7,100
- Resurface Tennis Courts - \$54,000

Mr. Kinsland suggested focusing on maintenance and upkeep with current infrastructure. He said they would like to begin working on the new Master Plan soon with focus on top emerging trends, park improvements to amenities and infrastructure, site specific plan updates for Vance and Rec Park, site topographic surveys, and focus on maintenance improvements. He said with a site survey, the new Master Plan would cost \$75,000-\$90,000. Mr. Kinsland proposed a 5-10% rate increase for recreation related fees. He said that labor and material prices are on the rise and the rate increase would remain competitive with the services offered.

Councilmember Dickson suggested using the term “urban trail”, rather than greenway. He added that the TDA is seeking Capital Project Funding, and the Dog Park enhancements might qualify, and Mr. Hites agreed.

## **L. PRIORITIZING EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING & ENGAGEMENT PRESENTATION**

- Page McCurry, Human Resources Director

Human Resources Director Page McCurry reviewed the results of the employee satisfaction survey and presented the action items the H.R. department completed since the employee satisfaction survey. Ms. McCurry said staff have updated the Personnel Policy to reflect more vacation, more compassionate bereavement policy, and a more generous longevity plan. She said they've provided staff with in-person

training on problem solving and Mental Health First Aid. She said that the Fire Department and summer camp staff will be taking the Mental Health First Aid training soon. Ms. McCurry said they will possibly be implementing a better Employee Assistance Program through Bree Health which would provide eight counseling sessions for employees per life event and an easy-to-use app. She added that this service will be less expensive for the town than the current EAP. Ms. McCurry said that Department Heads are meeting with Human Resources about developing department specific plans to improve their employee satisfaction survey scores. Ms. McCurry said she is holding monthly office hours at the Public Works Department, and the feedback has been very positive. She said that feedback from those office hours have helped to clarify misinformation, and she learned that employees would like improved on-call pay, they like the personnel policy updates, and one staff member suggested hiring a guidance counselor. Councilmember Feichter suggested a quarterly report of staff feedback. Ms. McCurry suggested forming a Workplace Innovation Team comprised of staff from every department (no supervisors) that would meet monthly to think of ideas to present to H.R. that would improve the workplace. She invited Councilmembers to attend the office hours at Public Services. Ms. McCurry announced that the town received their Recovery Friendly Workplace certification.

**M. ADDITIONAL BUSINESS**

Councilmember Dickson asked if staff had a chance to look at charging for street fairs and street closures. Mr. Fowler said he’s working with Lt. Benhart, and they have a rough draft of those events and what they cost the town. Councilmember Feichter said that trash cans are being upgraded downtown. Council thanked staff for all they do for the community.

**N. ADJOURN**

***A motion was made by Councilmember Sutton, seconded by Councilmember Dickson, to adjourn the meeting at 2:48pm. The motion passed unanimously.***

ATTEST:

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Gary Caldwell, Mayor

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Robert W. Hites, Jr. Town Manager

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Candace Poolton, Town Clerk