

Town of Seven Devils
Annual Workshop
Foscoe/Grandfather Community Center
March 27, 2019

The Town Council of Seven Devils met for the Annual Workshop on Wednesday, March 27, 2019 at 10:00am at the Foscoe/Grandfather Community Center. Present were Mayor Larry Fontaine, Mayor Pro Tem Brad Lambert, Members Tina Bailey, Kay Ehlinger and David Ehmig. Also present were Town Manager Debbie Powers and the minutes were recorded by Town Clerk Hillary Gropp.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Fontaine called the meeting to order at 10:05am.

PRAYER/INVOCATION

Mayor Pro Tem Lambert lead the prayer for the Annual Workshop.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Council members and staff recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

ADOPT AGENDA

Member Ehlinger made a motion to adopt the Agenda; Member Ehmig seconded the motion. The members agreed unanimously.

REVIEW COUNCIL 2018 ACHIEVEMENTS

January – TDA donated funds for Watauga County Veterans Memorial; Resolution approved for Hazard Mitigation Plan.

February – Two Resolutions approved in support of RTP & PARTF Grant applications.

March – Annexation of Kathe property on Grandview Drive; Approval of updated Recreation Master Plan; Dedicate Alpine Drive Extension as Town road; Town email converted to Microsoft Outlook.

April – Public Works Committee made their BRA recommendation for paving & gravel; The 2nd Annual Arbor Day Celebration was held the last Friday of April; The Planning Board reviewed Rezoning request from Cottom/Hawksnest. The application was withdrawn before submittal to the Town Council in 2018.

*Discussion occurred among Town Council at the 2019 Annual Workshop to review and possibly increase the application fee for rezoning. The additional funds will allow the Town to explore the potential impacts to the environment, stormwater, flood zone and fire protection needs for future rezoning requests. Manager Powers to follow up. **No action taken.***

May – Recreational Needs Survey was updated; the surveying for Otter Falls parking lot expansion begins; ASU Intern, Abby Cockerham created a historical scrapbook on the Town; Planning Board updated the CLUP (Comprehensive Land Use Plan).

June – The first stages of email water billing begin with notification to customers of this option; Ethics training is completed for Members Ehlinger, Lambert.

Discussion occurred among Town Council at the 2019 Annual Workshop to explore the possibility of adding a \$1.00 surcharge to water billing customers that use paper billing. Staff will follow up. No action taken.

July – 15th Annual SafetyFest was held; The Planning Board made 2 recommendations to Town Council for changes regarding the Tree Ordinance and Employee Handbook.

August – Avery County revaluation is final with a net effect increase of \$26 to the Town; NCDOT replaces the culverts on Skyland Drive; RTP & PARTF meet to award the grant recipients; Police Chief Chuck Davis announces his retirement intentions.

September – Town received the Annual Audit from Sharon Gillespie, CPA; Town’s paving projects are complete; Bid opening for Otter Falls parking lot expansion- Gilliam Construction winning bid; “The Hawk” 7K@7D is cancelled due to a Declaration of State of Emergency for Hurricane Florence.

October – The Town hosted the HCMA Bi-Annual dinner & meeting; the Tree City USA application was submitted to the Arbor Day Foundation; a new fuel card policy for the Town is established.

November - Public Works new truck (Ford F350) is delivered; the NCDOT Pedestrian Plan Grant application was submitted; Foreclosure on the Powell property complete and expands Otter Falls Park with additional ½ acre; Board & Committee appointments submitted to Town Council for approval.

December – Owner Heidenreich purchase vacant Town Lot PIN# 1878-25-3241-000; Chief Chuck Davis retires, and Town Council signs a Resolution of Appreciation & Proclamation of Chief Chuck Davis Day; TDA approves funding to update/remodel Town Hall; Reduction of deer inventory by 8, the targeted goal was 8.

Other Notable Achievements - Mayor Fontaine is awarded the “Outstanding Executive Board Member of HCCOG” at the annual banquet in September; Newly Elected Town Council Member Tina Bailey completed “Essentials of Municipal Government Training/Ethics”; Planning Board member Frank Sell attended a Planning Board workshop in May; Finance Officer Helga Sappington completes “Public Employment Law” course at UNC SOG in September; Two Town maps have been updated: Connect 7D now includes Brownlow Park and Waterline/Hydrant map updated by Town Engineer David Poore.

COUNCIL GOALS FOR 2019

Review Rezoning Requirements & Fees – Zoning Administrator to explore requirements and fees to align with the standards of other governments in the state.

Grant Opportunities – Continue focus with pursuing all grant opportunities for Peak Mountain Trail, Dog Park, etc.

Educational Training – Council supports education & training for Town staff.

Nuisance Ordinance – Explore measures to strengthen violations/fines for Short Term Rentals that cause damage to the Town’s roads/shoulders, as well as dog litter violations.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

NEW TOWN HALL/ARCHITECT

During the *Town Council Annual Workshop on March 22, 2018* the Town Council laid out a 2-step process to be followed as they considered the options for a new Town Hall. The following is detail from the *Final Minutes for Town Council Workshop-March 22, 2018*

Skyline Building/New Town Hall/Architect

Skyline Building – Step 1 - Dialogue occurred to approach Skyline via written communication about their intent to rent vs. sell; and costs of possible purchase; the pros and cons of acquiring this building for the Town were discussed. If no positive outcome, then the Town Council to shift focus and further explore the following:

New Town Hall – Step 2 – Put together a detailed list of the needs for a new Town Hall; facts will be gathered by speaking with Town Engineer, Staff needs and viewing other Town Halls in the region; decisions on expansion of existing or complete new build will be decided, along with the need for additional land acquisition. The Town budget includes line item for a future Town Hall in Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

In the following months, it was confirmed the intent of Skyline Telephone was to lease only, and not sell the building located at Hwy 105 and Seven Devils Road. The Town Council will only consider a purchase of the Skyline Building. Because of this, the Town implemented Step 2, as indicated above.

The Town Council took the following action as detailed below in the *Final Minutes for Town Council Meeting – December 13, 2018*

F. NEW TOWN HALL- Discussion among Town Council occurred about a new Town Hall facility. After an exploratory & continued dialogue since December 2016 with Skyline Telephone about their vacated building at Seven Devils Road & Highway 105, it is concluded this will not be an option for the Town's future needs.

As the Town enters the 3rd year of the planning process for a future Town Hall facility, with funds being set aside each Fiscal Year towards this goal, it is time to begin the next step of surveying Town owned land and initiating conversations with a Design/Build/Architect. After the satisfaction of a current loan in December 2020, the Town will actively move the process forward to a groundbreaking date for FY2021, meanwhile the Town will enter a due diligence phase to facilitate all steps needed until the commencement of new construction.

Mayor Pro Tem Lambert made a motion the Town will begin the steps of due diligence to build a new Town Hall in FY2021; Member Ehlinger seconded the motion. The members agreed unanimously.

~CLOSED~

During the 1st quarter of Calendar year 2019, Manager Powers has contacted or met with several architect firms including: Appalachian Architecture, Joseph Pavelchak, David Patrick Moses. As part of this due diligence process, she has gathered facts, provided needed functional requirements and acquired very preliminary cost estimates of new construction in the FY2021. The plans are to construct a new Administrative/Town Hall

Building on a vacant Town owned parcel located adjacent to the existing Town Hall. This information is included in the Agenda packet for the 2019 Town Council Annual Workshop.

On Thursday, March 14, 2019, Representatives for Skyline Telephone called to speak with Manager Powers. The purpose of their contact was to provide an update with a change of circumstances concerning the Skyline Building, as it is now available for purchase. Knowing the Town was previously interested in purchasing this building, they were reaching out to the Town to learn if we were still interested. Manager Powers provided this update to Mayor Fontaine and Mayor Pro Tem Lambert, as well as the remaining Town Council.

On Tuesday, March 19th, Manager Powers, Mayor Fontaine, Mayor Pro Tem Lambert, Police Chief Johnathan Harris and TDA Chairman Anne Fontaine representing the Town of Seven Devils met on site at the Skyline Building with Representatives of Skyline, including Brian Tester, Executive Director of Customer Operations and the listing Real Estate Broker, Josh Honeycutt. A walk through of the inside of the building occurred, as well as an exterior viewing. This building has a Total Heated space of 5851 sq. ft. and includes approximately 7.35 acres, with frontage along Highway 105 and Seven Devils Road. It is located within the Town limits. The listing price is 1,500,000.00.

The Town Council engaged in dialogue about which direction to pursue for a new Town Hall, to build new or to purchase the Skyline Building. As many unknowns exist with actual construction costs and timelines for a new building, the Town Council would like to further investigate and possibly enter into "Contract for Purchase" for the Skyline Building. Conversation occurred by all Town Council members, along with consideration of being good stewards of the Taxpayer's money and ultimately doing what is in the best interest of the Town now and for the future. Various purchase prices with loan options and interest rates were reviewed. Manager Powers had a conference call with the Local Government Commission and explained the required procedures to move forward with a purchase. Knowing "time is of the essence" to possibly purchase the Skyline Building, the Town Council decided it is imperative to create a steering committee, as there are many steps to be taken for such acquisition.

Member Ehmig made the motion to form the "Skyline Building Purchase Steering Committee", to include the members of Mayor Larry Fontaine, Mayor Pro Tem Brad Lambert and Member Kay Ehlinger and to contact Town Attorney Rob Angle, acting as the Town's representing Real Estate Broker and to give approval to Mayor Larry Fontaine to execute any/all necessary documents to procure a valid contract with Skyline Telephone. Member Bailey seconded the motion. The members agreed unanimously. ~OPEN~

CONSTRUCTION UPDATES– Manager Powers provided update for construction projects:
May (Lot 25, Rocky Top) – Permit issued in October 2017 with footers poured within 18 months, per owner request this has been extended by 6 months.
Kathe (Lot 2, Grandview) – House is under construction with continued progress to C/O.
Nottage (Alpine) – Owner reports construction to begin soon.
Cederberg (Blair Mountain) – Construction cancelled & Owner requests refund of fees.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS 2019

Manager Powers provided a calendar of Filing Dates & General Election Dates for 2019.
Mayor Larry Fontaine (*Term expires 12/31/2019*) stated he intends to file and run again for a seat on Town Council.
Member David Ehmig (*Term expires 12/31/2019*) stated he will not file again – His seat is open for election.
Member Kay Ehlinger (*Term expires 12/31/2019*) is uncertain, at this time what her intentions are for filing.
Member Tina Bailey (*Term expires 12/31/2021*) announced she is placing her house on the market; therefore, this might create a vacant seat before the end of her term.

POLICE DEPARTMENT VACANCY

Manager Powers reports there is a vacancy in the Police Department, and this isn't unique to our Town. Many of the students attending the BLET (Basic Law Enforcement Training) have committed to other towns. Currently, the Town is paying OT to our Officers, as well as using Reserve Officers to cover all shifts.

PRAYERS/INVOCATIONS AT TOWN MEETINGS

Discussion occurred about Prayer/Invocation at official Town meetings and it was decided the Town will continue to include this item on the Town Council Agenda.

MANAGER ITEMS

Manager Powers provided an overview of her goals for 2019 and include: Continued Grant opportunities for RTP & PARTF and dog park; Completion of Otter Falls parking expansion; Add 1 staff position-Part time/Intern as Parks & Recreation Technician; Complete updates/remodel projects at Town Hall; Continued dialogue, as needed, and RFP Architects for new Town Hall; Celebration of the Town's 40th Anniversary on August 23rd; Obtain the Caruso property or acquire a landscape deed; Continued Staff Training opportunities.

Other Manager Items:

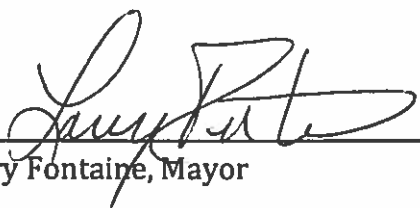
- Review of current loans – BAB & Snowcloud
- Cash position – Review of account balances & Reserves for Town
- Tax Collection Update – as of 3/26/2019 the collection rate is 99.82%
- 401(K) Employer contributions requested to increase from 3% to 4% match for general employees.

- A preliminary overview for the FY20 budget was provided. Further discussion will occur at the Town Council Budget Workshop
- Debbie's Fun Fact included a report by the High-Country Association of Realtors "Real estate sales strong as interest rates decline". There has been an increase from 2018 for new water accounts opened in the 1st quarter of 2019 for the Town.
- "Fun Fact" #2 is the Historical Tax Rates in Seven Devils with the tax rate being lower now FY2019 at .51, than FY2000 at .82. The fund balance on 6/30/18 was 73%.

COUNCIL COMMENTS - None

ADJOURN

Member Ehlinger made a motion to adjourn the Annual Workshop; Member Ehmig seconded the motion. The members agreed unanimously.



Larry Fontaine, Mayor



Hillary Gropp, Town Clerk

