

The regular meeting of the Board of Aldermen was held on Tuesday, April 6, 2021 at 6:00 pm in the Assembly Hall of the Municipal Building.

The following members of the Governing Body were present:

Mayor: Danny Ritchie
Alderman: Dennis Anthony
Alderman: Matt Johnson
Alderman: Rick Cline
Alderman: Terry Yount

Others present:

Town Manager: Sherri Bradshaw
Town Clerk: Sherry Dula
Attorney: Rod Willcox

Mayor Ritchie opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance followed by a moment of silence.

Approval of Minutes: The Council voted unanimously to approve the February minutes by a motion from Alderman Anthony, seconded by Alderman Johnson.

Resolution Opposing Senate Bill 288 – Mayor Ritchie asked if the Board had a chance to read the full Senate Bill 288 with all in agreement. Mayor Ritchie moved forward to say that the Town was not made aware of the bill in advance. He explained that this bill was introduced by Senator Warren Daniel and in this bill, changes would be made to our Town Charter and would move all municipal elections to even numbered years. Mayor Ritchie read the complete resolution. He stated that he had spoken with Senator Daniel to discuss the bill and to ask why the Town of Rhodhiss and the Town of Longview were excluded from the bill because they are also Burke County Municipalities and apparently his office staff didn't do enough research concerning Longview and Rhodhiss. Alderman Anthony asked why was this bill only targeted Burke County and not Caldwell and Avery Counties? Mayor Ritchie asked that question also but did not receive a satisfactory answer from Senator Daniel or his office. Mayor Ritchie explained that this would definitely minimize the importance of town elections and our candidates would get lost in the partisan State and Federal elections. He stated that this should be up to the Town Board to make any changes concerning our Charter or our election process. A motion was made by Alderman Yount, seconded by Alderman Johnson to approve the Resolution Opposing Senate Bill 288 and the vote was unanimous. A copy of the resolution is attached as part of the minutes.

Golden Leaf Information – Alderman Johnson asked for update concerning Golden Leaf application. Manager Bradshaw stated that we were awarded the \$500,000 in grant monies which is earmarked for clean up and sewer line infrastructure on the Drexel Properties. She said that an article should be in the paper concerning our grant award. She also made the Board aware that as soon as we hear from the EPA grant in June then we could possibly start doing some work on the property.

2020-2021 Audit Contract – Manager Bradshaw presented the proposed contract from Boggs, Crump & Brown for the 2020-2021 annual audit. The total expense for the audit and annual reports in \$12,025.00. Mayor Ritchie reviewed the expense and stated that this is well worth the cost. A motion was made by Alderman Anthony, seconded by Alderman Yount to approve the 2020-2021 Annual Audit Contract and the vote was unanimous. A copy of the contract is attached as part of the minutes.

Budget Amendment – Manager Bradshaw reviewed the Budget Amendment to the current budget and explained that the amendment consists of adjusting line items within departments. Below are some of the items included in the Budget Amendment:

- Receipt of COVID Relief Funds in the amount of \$50,550
- Receipt of the credit from ElectriCities of excess operating funds which were placed in a reserve fund for Drexel Properties
- Sales Tax Reimbursement increased by \$80,000 from original projections which will be a huge asset to the town's General Fund

A motion was by Alderman Cline, seconded by Alderman Johnson to adopt the Budget Amendment to the current budget and the vote was unanimous. A copy of the Budget Amendment is attached as part of the minutes.

Budget Discussion for the proposed 2021-2022 Budget – Manager Bradshaw reviewed items for the proposed budget and stated that it was still a work in progress but that it would be similar to the current budget.

- Tax Rate proposed to remain the same at 0.38 per \$100
- No Electric Rate Increase
- No Water/Sewer Rate Increase as long as City of Morganton and Town of Valdese rates stay the same
- Solid Waste Fee to remain the same
- Recycling behind R.O. Huffman Center is used by outside town residents as much as inside town residents but only town citizens pay for it. Need some guidance on whether we should continue to offer this service
- Powell Bill – No project budgeted for the upcoming year. Due to the Woodman Street and Hollar Street projects, the funds are running low and need to be built back up
- Continued sidewalk maintenance to include Settlemyre Road, Mt. View Street, and Park Avenue.
- Proposed 2% COLA for employees to go into effect in January, 2022
- Insurance Rates – Don't have a concrete figure for those to date. Could possibly range from a 2% decrease to as high as an 11% increase
- Retirement System increase for employer contribution
- Public Works Department will continue electric line rehab
- Water Connection upgrade will still be included in the new budget.
- Sewer Line Rehab
- Replacing water meters with radio read meters. We currently have replaced 198 water meters with radio read meters across town
- Public Works Equipment – Mower replacement
- Grapple Truck final payment in new budget year
- Police Department – Vehicle Replacement for the 2005 Ford Explorer to pose as an extra vehicle
- Separation Allowance Funds – With the retirement of several police officers in the next 10 years, we need to start a reserve fund to help with this expense. Town is mandated to do this and must pay the retired officer until they are 62 years old.
- Recreation Center – Roof Repairs and One HVAC unit replacement. Received two bids for roof shingle replacement.
- Fairgrounds – New floor in exhibit hall and office, roof on Firemen's Food Booth and First Baptist Food Booth. Estimated cost is \$7,600 (Metal Roof). Manager Bradshaw asked how far and how much

maintenance and repairs the town is willing to do. Mayor Ritchie stated that all requests will come to the Board and a limit will be set at some point. Alderman Yount stated that in the early 80's the Drexel Community Center received half of the profits from the fair proceeds but now the Town is responsible

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for upkeep and receive no proceeds. Alderman Cline has the same feelings, he states we are assuming all the large maintenance and money expense but receive no proceeds. Mayor Ritchie stated that the Drexel Fair is the only thing that enhances our Town. Alderman Anthony also states that we put money in but get nothing back.

- Fairgrounds would like a zero-turn mower. Some discussion on this matter resulted in the Board suggesting that they get a used mower. Mayor Ritchie stated that if the mower that is rotated from the Public Works Department works well enough then it should be given to the Fair Board.
- Code Enforcement Officer and Planning & Zoning Staff contracted through Western Piedmont Council of Governments is included in new budget year
- Drexel Property Electric Funds – Carry over from current year budget
- Online Payments – Manager Bradshaw stated that the Town has been absorbing the online fees since April of last year in the amount of approximately \$14,000. Needs guidance on whether to continue absorbing online fees. Alderman Johnson made a motion to go back to customer paying online fees, seconded by Alderman Yount and the vote was unanimous.
- Property Tax Discounts – At present, the Town gives 2% discount if taxes are paid in August. Does the Board want to stay with a 2% discount or reduce to 1% discount? Mayor Ritchie would like to table this discussion until Manager speaks with Tax Collector to get more information on whether it would benefit us to keep the same discount or change it.
- Parking Lot Lease – Alderman Anthony would like to terminate the lease because we may need this lot cleared if we were to get a potential business interested in the Drexel Properties. How much notice is needed to terminate the lease? Manager Bradshaw said the Town needed to give a 30 day notice. A motion was made by Alderman Cline to terminate the lease agreement, seconded by Alderman Johnson and the vote was unanimous.

*****Board asked for a 5 minute recess at 7:37 pm*****

*****Board reconvenes at 7:42 pm*****

- Employee vacation time accrual – Manager Bradshaw is proposing that we add steps to our vacation accrual. After comparing our benefit to other municipalities, we are well below the standard. We have no extra accrual time for employees who have more than 10 years of service with the town. Mayor Ritchie recommended adding additional steps to our vacation accrual. A motion was made by Alderman Anthony, seconded by Alderman Yount to add additional steps to our employee vacation benefit and the vote was unanimous.
- Downtown Redevelopment Plan – Manager Bradshaw would like to see more of the buildings downtown to be opened and maintained to be more presentable when someone drives through downtown. She stated this would take investment of Board time and property owners time. She would like to have a meeting with Board and property owners to get input on what it would take to make our town more presentable to the public. Mayor Ritchie stated that he had been approached by Don Bumgarner concerning his interest in opening a Drexel Museum if a property was available for this project. Manager Bradshaw made the Board aware that there are grants available for main street revitalization programs. She would like to set up a meeting separate from our regular board meeting for the Board to meet the property owners in Drexel and have a discussion concerning this project. Mayor Ritchie would like to have approval for the manager to pursue the Downtown Revitalization Project. A motion was made by

Alderman Yount, seconded by Alderman Anthony to authorize Manager Bradshaw in pursuing the Downtown Revitalization Project and the vote was unanimous.

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Fire Department Part-time Personnel Request – Chief Baker was present to request paid part-time personnel for the department. He stated he would like to have someone working Monday through Friday from 8 pm until 5 pm. This employee would have no benefits beyond hourly pay and would require at least 3-5 persons signing up for the days they would work. Chief Baker has consulted with other departments and most departments have a daytime fireman. He stated our response time is unacceptable when our department took 26 minutes to respond to the last fire. Alderman Anthony asked if a fireman was here fulltime, what would the response time be. With a person here each day, this would bring the response time within approximately 2-5 minutes. The part-time fireman would still be responsible for running all medicals calls. He says there is plenty to do because our building is in rundown and needs maintenance. He requests a potential pay of \$14.00 per hour and he has several in mind for the position. Alderman Johnson asked how they would differentiate when they are volunteers versus part-time employees? Chief Baker said that when they are working their 8 hour shift, they are employees that day. Mayor Ritchie recommended that before they vote, Chief Baker would need to have a firm job description and consult with other departments on how they are managing this part-time position. Mayor Ritchie asked if he would be looking in house first? And also, he would need at least four firemen interested to fulfill this request. Chief Baker stated that he has 4-5 interested firemen and they are in house. Alderman Yount stated in years past the fire department had a full-time person but after three months they were caught not doing anything. There was some discussion on how they would be supervised. Chief Baker said they would have a daily checklist. Mayor Ritchie stated that there is plenty to do but not everyone is as responsible as they need to be. Mayor Ritchie asked if the Board would like to table this until further information was presented. Alderman Johnson made a motion to table the request until more information is gathered, seconded by Alderman Anthony and the vote was unanimous. Mayor Ritchie stated the Board is not saying no to the request just asking for more information before a decision is made.

May Carnival and August Fair – Don Deal has asked how the Board feels about the upcoming carnival and fair. He said the state is supposed to make a decision on April 7th at 1 pm on when events such as the carnival will be allowed to start back. Alderman Cline stated that in his personal opinion he would recommend no spring carnival. Alderman Johnson also states he thinks it's too early to have a carnival in May and doesn't recommend it. Alderman Anthony states that the schools are going back full time but they still have to social distance and wear masks. Mayor Ritchie asked Attorney Willcox about town liability in this situation. Attorney Willcox states that any lawsuits can come back to the town because since we own the property then we are a party in the matter. It was asked to the Police Chief how he feels about having the carnival and he said that if signs are put up saying to wear masks the majority of the people will not wear them and those who are wearing will want the police to enforce wearing of masks which will not be easy. Mayor Ritchie asked the Board if they recommend the Spring Carnival. Alderman Johnson says that he does not recommend the Spring Carnival and all the other Board members were in agreement. Mayor Ritchie also asked Board what the recommendation would be for the August Fair. Alderman Johnson made a motion to table discussion on the August Fair until the May meeting, seconded by Alderman Yount with Alderman Anthony voting yes and Alderman Cline voting no.

Departmental Reports – The Council reviewed the financial and tax reports for March, 2021. A copy of each report is attached as part of the minutes.

Drexel Police Department – Chief Treadway reviewed the March Police report and stated it was a busy month. A copy of the report is attached as part of the minutes. Earlier in the meeting Alderman Anthony asked the Chief if body cameras had ever been purchased. Chief Treadway stated that they had never purchased them. He said that he has been hesitant on implementing body cameras with the controversy they have caused in certain cases. He would want them for officer involved shootings but there are also liability issues if there are children involved. The department would need a strong SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) in order to implement body cameras. Chief Treadway also stated that he is trying to phase out car cameras. He stated the

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car outlasts the camera and it seems they are just a waste of money. Car cameras can't record everything but it can record voices. The cameras are great tools as long as they are used in the right way.

Attorney Report – Nothing to report at this time.

Recreation Department – Manager Bradshaw stated that the R.O. Huffman Center is now having Softball/Baseball sign ups.

Planning & Zoning Report – A copy of the Planning Staff Report is attached as part of the minutes. In process of working on updating chicken ordinance. Jason Ramsey had to have knee replacement and his dad had surgery also, so they are out of commission at this time. Alderman Anthony asked about the progress of the Code of Ordinances updates. Teresa Kinney stated that they were waiting on the 160D but she thinks it is complete and needs one more hearing. Alderman Yount still has concerns about transfer trailers being used as storage units on residential properties and we are getting no tax revenue. Teresa Kinney said she will review our ordinance and see how it is worded and get back to the Board. Mayor Ritchie said to make note of all the locations of these storage trailers and if it isn't addressed in the ordinance then an ordinance will need to be created. Teresa Kinney did state that if the trailers are tagged and insured then they are being taxed.

Miscellaneous –

- Next Board Meeting May 4th at 6pm. Alderman Anthony made the Board aware that he would be out of town for the May meeting. Mayor Ritchie stated that if no one else has a conflict we will keep May meeting as scheduled and a week before the meeting if anyone has a conflict we can reschedule at that time.
- WPCOG Annual Meeting will be held virtual on April 22nd at 2pm

Adjournment – A motion was made by Alderman Johnson, seconded by Alderman Yount to adjourn the regular meeting at 8:10 p.m. and the vote was unanimous.

TOWN CLERK _____

MAYOR _____

ALDERMAN _____

ALDERMAN _____

ALDERMAN _____

ALDERMAN _____