

Board of Commissioners
Town of Tryon
Budget Meeting Minutes

January 29, 2021

I. Call to order

Mayor Alan Peoples called the meeting to order Tryon Town Council at 12:02 on 01/29/2021 at Tryon Town Hall.

II. Roll call

The following persons were present: Commissioner Crys Armbrust, Commissioner Bill Crowell, Commissioner Bill Ingham, Commissioner Chrelle Booker, Mayor Alan Peoples, Town Manager Zach Ollis, and TDDA Executive Director Paige Henderson.

III. Open Discussion

Town Manager Zach Ollis began the discussion by going over upcoming dates for continued budget discussion workshops: specifically, February 11, February 24 and March 9. On February 11, the council will hear from the Sanitation Department, on February 24, the council will hear from the Public Works Department, and on March 9, the council will hear from the Police and Fire Departments.

Mr. Ollis explained that the budget document essentially represented last year's budget without adding in the capital expenditures. Mr. Ollis also provided an overview of the budget codes, and added that the town was doing fairly well on tax collection rates. Mr. Ollis noted that property tax was similar to last year, motor vehicles only about \$4,000 less than last year, and sales tax was on par for the year. Overall, Mr. Ollis praised the town's projections for being done fairly well.

Mr. Ollis mentioned that the main focus of the day's session would be property taxes, sparking a discussion among the board about the rising value of property taxes in the county, during which Mr. Ollis stated that the property values were only going to go up, and reminded the board of their ability to go revenue neutral this year or remain the same regarding taxes. Mr. Ollis encouraged the board to consider the options.

Commissioner Bill Crowell suggested that the board observe what the county decides to do and be prepared to make a decision after that.

Mr. Ollis reminded the board that they did not opt for the revenue neutral option in the past so that they would be able to adjust taxes in the future, and praised the board for making a wise decision.

Mr. Ollis advised that the town staff was still waiting on revenues to be reported from the county, which he expected by April, and would make projections based on that. Mr. Ollis noted that this has been a reevaluation year.

Commissioner Crowell asked when the reevaluation would be completed.

Mr. Ollis remarked that he is still waiting on the reevaluation numbers from the county.

Mayor Peoples asked Commissioner Chrelle Booker and Commissioner Bill Ingham to comment on the state of the market in Tryon, and both of them made remarks about the houses that were going above asking price in the surrounding area.

Commissioner Ingham raised a question of ethics regarding the Melrose property, and asked the board for their opinion on the correct way to get the property on the market.

Mr. Ollis advised that the board should go with whatever agent would be able to list the property for free.

Commissioner Ingham explained that his concern was based on potential issues that could arise among the realtors in town, and wanted to be sure that it was a fair selection process.

Commissioner Booker mentioned the rising number of people moving into Tryon, many of whom are from bigger cities, and added that things would likely have to change around Tryon to keep up with this new group of people.

Mr. Ollis mentioned that the board needed to address the replacement of Tax Collector Pam Justice, who will likely begin the retirement process in around a year. The board inquired about the previous employee, who was a part-time assistant for Mrs. Justice and was training for her position. Mr. Ollis informed the board that she had taken a full-time position with another company, but believed they could potentially persuade her to come back with a full-time position offer.

Mayor Peoples asked Mr. Ollis what the salary requirement might be with matching.

Mr. Ollis suggested that they might consider somewhere between \$40,000 and \$48,000 with a 401k. Mr. Ollis explained that during the budgeting process, the town created the budget as if each employee contributed 2% for matching to account for those potential expenditures.

Mayor Peoples clarified that for all intensive purposes, the person hired to train under Mrs. Justice would need to be a new position for around a year until Mrs. Justice retired.

Mr. Ollis agreed and added that the board would need only to add onto the salary that had been previously approved for the parttime position for around \$16,000 until the temporary training position could fill Mrs. Justice's position permanently.

Mr. Ollis noted that the financial state of the town was better than it had been in a long time, and felt that thanks to the Cares Act funding available and the recent successful grant for the Carolina Drive improvements, the board would be able to accomplish a lot of projects this year with the money saved.

Mr. Ollis did mention that some other departments were interested in adding positions, but the one he felt most concerned about addressing at the current time was Mrs. Justice's position.

Mayor Peoples asked if the town would need to hire a contractor for a year to help complete the work, and Mr. Ollis answered that he did not feel that would be necessary as long as Mrs. Justice had a year to train her replacement.

Commissioner Booker agreed that a year should be sufficient for what needed to be taught to the incoming employee.

Mr. Ollis noted that the same thing has been done for another employee at the water plant, and that arrangement has worked out well for the replacement.

Mr. Ollis remarked that other than addressing Mrs. Justice's position replacement, the other big item that he was waiting on was the full report from the Lake Lanier dam assessment completed last month. Commissioner Armbrust asked if the town had received any preliminary reports from the company. Mr. Ollis said that some of the employees had contracted COVID-19, so they are currently recovering from that and not working at the moment. Mr. Ollis reassured the board that he would follow up on the inquiry and let them know when he heard anything.

Commissioner Armbrust asked to talk about special design projects. Specifically, he mentioned the potential camping spots at Harmon Field.

Mayor Peoples asked about RV set-ups and water hookups.

Commissioner Ingham remarked that the Harmon Field board recently had the conversation about bringing camping to the park, and mentioned that some of the Harmon Field board members were uncomfortable bringing in people that they did not know to stay overnight in the park.

Mr. Ollis noted that Jeff Arrowood, Chief of Police, said he would look into getting background checks for anyone interested in a camping permit for Harmon Field.

Commissioner Armbrust remarked that Harmon Field was one of our least monetized resources in town, and suggested that we consider the National Parks approach to camping and permitting.

Commissioner Crowell reiterated the need for proper hookups, and suggested that the board also consider using Harmon Field for special events.

Mr. Ollis noted that the Boy Scouts of America has used the area in the past for camping, and also mentioned that issues with camping at Harmon Field began with a conflict with the Blue Ridge Hunters and Jumpers contract.

Mayor Peoples remarked that he and Commissioner Ingham knew of a local person who managed those types of public/private spaces and believed they would be able to manage camping at Harmon Field if needed.

Commissioner Ingham made remarks about the Greenville Watershed agreement, and Mayor Peoples reiterated that it may be worth working with a management group.

Mr. Ollis reassured the board that they could prioritize funding for the land at Harmon Field for whatever they thought was best.

Commissioner Crowell mentioned that he wanted to discuss putting a sidewalk around Sidestreet Pizza and Pasta and the railroad crossing, because he encountered a young family over the previous weekend that had been trying to cross the road near the area with a stroller and young children.

Commissioner Armbrust mentioned that in his experience of working on past projects with the railroad, the easiest thing to do would be just to start working on it.

Commissioner Crowell spoke about a way to go around the area in question and feasibility, and again Commissioner Armbrust encouraged the board to just begin the project.

Mayor Peoples encouraged everyone to remember that the Town could not directly be involved in anything unless it was done properly.

Commissioner Armbrust mentioned that someone would be coming to the town to talk about a grant for a music performance venue downtown.

Mr. Ollis and Commissioner Crowell inquired to confirm the location for the venue. Commissioner Armbrust confirmed that the location would be McCown Street so that the venue could be closed off.

Mayor Peoples asked Mr. Ollis if additional employees needed to be provided elsewhere in the town. Mr. Ollis said that if the town were able, there were some areas where there could be additional help, but his main focus is succession planning for Mrs. Justice. He mentioned the need for someone to assist the Town Clerk, Susan Bell, as well as the need for an in-house accountant.

Commissioner Booker spoke about her experience with human resources management and how she felt that smaller groups of people were easier to effectively manage.

Mayor Peoples echoed Commissioner Booker and agreed that 5-8 people would be a proper number for effective management.

Mr. Ollis made remarks about the police department and fire department doing well with staff, as well as Harmon Field, Sanitation and Street Crew. Mr. Ollis also talked about the Public Works department, and mentioned that the board would need to consider Public Works Director Jody Morse's retirement in the coming years as well.

Commissioner Booker remarked that the Eastside Community wanted to have more help with kudzu removal. She also mentioned that she wanted to check on the progress of the demolition of a house on 427 East Howard Street.

Commissioner Crowell mentioned that the town could go after a grant for equipment that people could rent to use for kudzu removal, and suggested that the town only supply chemicals that can kill kudzu.

Commissioner Booker asked whose name was on the house at 427 East Howard Street.

Mr. Ollis began looking on the County GIS site, and Mayor Peoples got up to ask Town Planner Tim Daniels.

Commissioner Armbrust asked whether the town was supposed to get Skyrunner (a tower for improved cell service).

Mr. Ollis answered Commissioner Armbrust that yes, the town was supposed to see this happen, but the company needed to get a variance through the county.

Commissioner Crowell asked if the area in question (for the Skyrunner project) belonged to the town, and if it would be possible to annex it.

Mr. Ollis answered Commissioner Crowell that it would not be possible to annex unless the town reached an agreement with Columbus on the land.

Mayor Peoples said that Mr. Daniels confirmed that all of the paperwork necessary to demolish the 427 East Howard Street property had been completed.

Commissioner Booker explained to the rest of the board where the location of the house on East Howard Street.

Commissioner Crowell asked for clarification from Mr. Daniels about the status of the house, and Commissioner Booker asked if Mr. Daniels had spoken with the owners.

Mr. Daniels mentioned that he had attempted to contact the homeowner (who lives out of state) and that they have been notified, but that he will follow up with them again.

Mayor Peoples remarked that he thought the homeowner intended to fix the house up to rent it out.

Mr. Ollis confirmed that the town would take steps to carry out the demolition since the proper paperwork had been completed.

Commissioner Booker said that all she needed to ask about for this meeting was the kudzu removal as well as the demolition of the house.

Mr. Ollis stated that maybe, depending on taxes, the town would be able to create a grant program for kudzu removal (potential for matching program). He also mentioned that while the town could potentially get backpack sprayers to rent to individuals, he did not believe that the town would be able to give out any type of chemical, because those types of substances typically require certain certifications to use.

Mayor Peoples echoed Mr. Ollis and agreed that no one without proper certification would be able to use those types of chemicals.

Mr. Ollis said that he would add the kudzu program into the projects section of the budget.

Mr. Ollis also mentioned Bryant Park.

Mayor Peoples stated that he loved capital projects because they will make the town beautiful.

Commissioner Ingham stated that a project he really cared about was beautifying the front of the police department.

Mr. Ollis agreed and said that Chief Arrowwood had hoped for that for a long time.

Commissioner Ingham mentioned that improving the façade would be relatively simple, and encouraged the board to consider this.

Mr. Ollis reiterated that if the board kept taxes the way that they have been, they will have the money to tackle a lot of similar projects.

Mayor Peoples informed the board that he may not be able to be at all of the future budget sessions as he is adjusting to caring for his wife, though he would try.

Commissioner Ingham informed the board that he had been subpoenaed for the 11th of February and would be unable to attend the budget session.

Mr. Ollis made the board aware of a potential legal issue arising with someone who damaged the sewer near the Strawberry Hill House. Mr. Ollis reassured the board that he was talking with the parties and willing to do whatever was needed to help, but that he wanted the board to be made aware due to the historical significance of the home.

Mayor Peoples asked Mr. Ollis if they had ever put in a sewer at the home.

Mr. Ollis answered that there was no recorded easement.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:58pm.

J. Alan Peoples, Mayor

Attest:

Susan B. Bell, Town Clerk