

Town of West Jefferson - Board of Aldermen
Regular Meeting Minutes
February 6, 2023 | 6:00 pm

Board Members Present: Mayor Tom Hartman, Alderman Rusty Barr, Alderman Calvin Green, Alderwoman Crystal Miller, Alderman John Reeves, and Alderman Stephen Shoemaker

Town Staff Present: Town Manager Brantley Price, Town Attorney Jak Reeves, Town Clerk Rebecca Eldreth, Police Chief Brad Jordan, Maintenance Supervisor Eric Miller, and Wastewater Superintendent Brandon Patrick

At 6:00 pm Mayor Hartman called to order the meeting of the Board of Alderman. After the invocation was given, those in attendance stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval February 6, 2023 Agenda – Mayor Hartman requested the addition of an Interlocal Agreement between the Town of West Jefferson and the County of Ashe for the ownership and maintenance of Mount Paddy. Alderman Reeves made the motion to approve the agenda with the addition. Alderman Shoemaker seconded with a vote of 5-0 in favor.

Regular Session

Consideration of Interlocal Agreement – The Mayor presented the Interlocal Agreement between the County of Ashe and The Town of West Jefferson to establish the parks and recreation systems for Mount Paddy. With no discussion, Alderman Reeves made the motion to approve the agreement as presented. Alderwoman Miller seconded the motion with a vote of 5-0 in favor.

Consideration of 2023 Christmas in July Festival – Cochairs for the festival, John Smyre and Jane Lonon came before the board for approval of the 2023 Christmas in July layout. The footprint will be the same as the previous year. Road closures will include East Main Street from Jefferson Avenue to Third Ave, West Main Street from Backstreet to Jefferson Avenue, First Street from Jefferson Avenue to Third Avenue, State Street from Jefferson Avenue to Third Avenue, the parking lot by Dr. Rector’s Office, and the public parking lot on Jefferson Avenue and State Street starting at midnight on Thursday, June 29th. The following night the entire festival footprint will close with the addition of Jefferson Avenue from Long Street to Second Street, the remainder of Main Street and Third Avenue along with all side streets. Alderman Barr expressed concerns for a business located on Third Avenue and how the road closure affects their business. Alderman Shoemaker made the motion to approve the footprint as presented. Alderwoman Miller seconded the motion with a vote of 4-1 in favor with Alderman Barr opposing.

Consideration of 2023 Antique Fair – Debbie Jordan representing the Antique Fair requested the dates and presented the 2023 road closure for the fair. The Antique Fair will take place on Friday, September 15 and Saturday, September 16 and will follow the same closures as previous years. Alderman Reeves made the motion to approve the dates and footprint of the fair. Alderman Shoemaker seconded the motion with a vote of 5-0 in favor.

Consideration of 2023 Ashe Pregnancy Care Center Walk for Life – Trisha Dillard with the Pregnancy Center came before the board to request the use of the Backstreet park and Town

streets for the 2023 Walk for Life on September 30th from 8:00 am until 12:00 pm. Alderman Barr made the motion to approve the 2023 Walk for Life. Alderman Reeves seconded the motion with a vote of 5-0 in favor.

Consideration of Library in the Park – Laura McPherson from the Library made the request to host a foam party in the park as part of the summer reading program. With no discussion, Alderman Shoemaker made the motion to approve the use of the park for the summer reading program. Alderwoman Miller seconded the motion with a vote of 5-0 in favor.

Consideration of 5K Fuel Fundraiser – Twila Miller came before the board to change the date of the 5k fuel assistance fundraiser from February 25 to March 25. Alderman Shoemaker made the motion to approve the date change. Alderman Reeves seconded the motion with a vote of 5-0 in favor.

Consideration of Summer Literacy Initiative– The Mayor explained that the West Jefferson Methodist Church is working on a summer literacy initiative through Duke Endowment Grant. The program will assist the children in Ashe County learn to read and read better. The program will target readers in rural areas that are in first through third grade. The board was in consensus to discuss the topic further at the March meeting.

Financial Review – Town Manager Brantley Price provided a review of the financials after 6 months for each department.

Discussion of Midnight Runners Cruise In – The Mayor led a discussion concerning the upcoming Blue Ridge Runners Cruise Ins. There have been several complaints from merchants and residents as well as positive comments from those who enjoy the cruise ins. The mayor would like to see collaboration between the Midnight Runners, the Town, and merchants by adhering to the current regulations and receiving a no cost permit from the Town for the events. The Mayor continued by saying he is not telling the cruisers not to come, but he is asking them to work with the Town. After more discussion Alderman Shoemaker made the motion for a conversation to be held between the Town and the Blue Ridge Midnight Runners concerning the cruise ins. Alderman Reeves seconded the motion with a vote of 3-2 in favor with Alderman Barr and Alderwoman Miller opposing.

Discussion of Board of Adjustment Dates – Town Clerk Rebecca Eldreth would like to set three date in the future for Board of Adjustment meetings to review special use permits for short term rentals. Alderman Reeves made the motion to hold the meeting on the same day as the regular monthly meetings in May, June, August, and December. Alderman Shoemaker seconded the motion with a vote of 5-0 in favor.

Tax Releases – Mayor Hartman explained that Fast Cash Pawn had duplicate bills that totaled \$16.23 over several years that need to be released. The county does not bill anything less than \$5 due to the expense. The Mayor asked if the board would like to give town staff permission not to bill anything \$5 or less. With not further discussion, Alderman Shoemaker made the motion to approve the tax release as presented. Alderwoman Miller seconded the motion with a vote of 5-0 in favor. Then, Alderman Shoemaker made the motion to not bill any personal property bill that is \$5 or less. Alderman Green seconded the motion with a vote of 5-0 in favor.

Police Report – Chief Jordan gave his report to the Board for the month of January. A total of 191 calls were dispatched through the communications center including 4 motor vehicle crashes, 8 larcenies, 5 drug cases, 2 DWIs, 7 minor citations, and other miscellaneous calls. Chief Jordan shared that the department has brought on 2 new officers and are working to complete the police policy manual with the hopes of presenting it to the board at the next meeting. The Board thanked Chief Jordan for his report.

Water and Wastewater Report – Wastewater Superintendent Brandon Patrick gave his report to the Board. A total of 4.25 inches of rain were reported for the month. The second stage of sewer lining was completed last week. Since the completion the amount of flow to the plant has been reduced by 14 million gallons compared to last year with an additional 2 inches of rain. That equates to 60 days of average flow being kept out of the system. The amount of unaccounted for water was also reduced by finding and repairing leaks in the system. In 2021, about 26% of the water pumped was lost through leaks followed by only 16% the next year. Both filters are currently operating producing between 90,000 and 100,000 gallons per day. The Board thanked Brandon for his report.

Maintenance Report – Maintenance Supervisor Eric Miller gave his report to the Board. A total of 31 one call tickets were located, 2 water leaks, and 3 sewer issues for the month. The sewer lining is complete. The High Country Council of Governments is mapping all new meters and valves to update the water and sewer files. The maintenance department has chipped 2 loads of brush, taken 1 load to the landfill, and completed other general maintenance tasks throughout the month. The board thanked Eric for his report.

Town Managers Report – Brantley Price, Town Manager gave his report to the Board. The sewer rehab project has repaired the laterals on Buck Mountain. Next, we will add cleanouts and repair lines crossing the creek. Taxes collected to date total 93.6% of the levy. The property revaluation increased tax value by 46% with the county increasing 43.6% overall. Sales tax for the month of October was up 12% over the prior year with year-to-date up 15.5%. Brantley attended the commissioners meeting where they adopted the interlocal agreement for Paddy Mountain. The preliminary itinerary for the Year of the Trail is complete. The students at UNCG are doing a façade rendering of Town Hall to provide ideas on how to update the exterior of the building. Imagination Ashe is planning to continue the Caboose Kids program during the months of June and July. Visitors at St. Mary's for the year of 2022 total over 26,000. Brantley provided an overview of the city and county managers seminar he attended. Several fire departments have made the switch to hybrid departments with paid and volunteer members. Police departments have to come more flexible allowing beards and piercings. Young people are coming out of BLET and only staying with the department 1-5 years so the department must be ready to rehire. Departments need to build trust and relationships with the community. The state is looking for ways to add funding for roads as electric vehicles will reduce the gas tax for roads. One idea is to take a percentage of sales tax for any items purchased for vehicles to cover the reduction in gas tax. The Board thanked Brantley for his report.

Public Comments – The Mayor open the floor for public comment. Several members of the audience came forward to express their concerns for the changes to short term rentals specifically the low density residential district. Robin Miller, Karen Hall, Justin Childers, Beverly Black, and John Blevins all spoke during the public comment asking for the board to reconsider their stance

on restricting short term rentals in the low density district. The mayor closed public comment at 7:44pm.

Aldermen Comments – The board each took the time to acknowledge the public comments that were made at the meeting tonight stating that intentions were not to harm anyone as they want to protect the citizens of the town.

Closed Session – Alderman Green made the motion to enter closed session per GS 143.318.11(a)(6) to consult the Town Board concerning personnel. Alderman Shoemaker seconded with a vote of 5-0 on favor. The time was 8:03pm

Return to Regular Session – The Board returned to regular session to adjourn the meeting.

Adjournment – With nothing further, Alderman Reeves made the motion to adjourn the regular meeting, seconded by Alderman Barr with a vote of 5-0 in favor. The time was 8:55pm.

Tom Hartman, Mayor

Rebecca Eldreth, Town Clerk