

**Minutes of the
Mineral Springs Town Council
Regular Meeting / Public Hearing
April 8, 2021 – 7:30 p.m.**

The Town Council of the Town of Mineral Springs, North Carolina, met in Regular Session and Public Hearing at the Mineral Springs Town Hall located at 3506 Potter Road South, Mineral Springs, North Carolina, at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 8, 2021.

Present: Mayor Frederick Becker III, Councilman Jerry Countryman, Councilwoman Janet Critz, Councilwoman Lundeen Cureton (arrived at 7:33 p.m.), Councilwoman Bettylyn Krafft, and Councilwoman Peggy Neill.

Absent: Mayor Pro Tem Valerie Coffey.

Staff Present: Town Clerk/Zoning Administrator Vicky Brooks, Attorney Bobby Griffin, and Deputy Town Clerk Janet Ridings.

Visitors: Donald Gaddy and Charles Nolan.

1. Opening

With a quorum present at 7:32 p.m. on April 8, 2021, Mayor Frederick Becker called the Regular Town Council Meeting to order.

Councilwoman Neill delivered the invocation.

Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Public Hearing – Proposed Text Amendment (TA-2021-02)

Mayor Becker called the Proposed Text Amendment (TA-2021-02) Public Hearing to order at 7:33 p.m.

There were no public hearing comments.

Applicant Charles Nolan stated he was the advocate for a text amendment to allow "Gunsmithing" by special permit in the RA20 zoning district. Gunsmithing is currently allowed in the RA40 and RR zoning districts and the only distinction between these districts is the density of housing, unrelated to gunsmithing. Mr. Nolan commented it was consistent with diversification; the Mineral Springs guide says, "you encourage diverse businesses". The town does not have a place for gunsmithing or sales of guns/rifles, etc. Shooting is very popular in Mineral Springs, as well as the adjoining areas. Mr. Nolan explained recently the one in Monroe (Gander Mountain) closed and moved to Concord or someplace inconvenient to travel to. Mr. Nolan stated he would just like to serve the people in Mineral Springs, he lives right down the street and people can come right up to his house where he is going to do it initially until he can save up enough money to open a commercial shop in town.

Councilwoman Critz asked Mr. Nolan how long he had been doing gunsmithing.

Mr. Nolan responded he was a federal firearms license owner. What happens when there is a change of address, the Department of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms wants to know that it is

permitted where you live. Currently it is not, so getting the text amendment is the first step toward the special permit process; right now, Mr. Nolan is on hold.

Councilwoman Critz asked Mr. Nolan where he was previously working out of.

Mr. Nolan responded he lived in Virginia and moved here with his wife in 2009. Where Mr. Nolan lived in Virginia it was a permitted use, but when they moved here, they got the grandkids. Now that they are gone, he asked his son to get a safe deposit box. Mr. Nolan has a renewed interest in doing gunsmithing here.

Councilman Countryman asked if Mr. Nolan was a gunsmith or if his primary interest was selling firearms.

Mr. Nolan responded one of the requirements, as Councilman Countryman knows, if a person wants to buy a gun off the internet (for example), they have to have a FFL and holder to transfer the gun to them, so his primary business would probably be, "hey Chuck, I want this gun, will you order it, or I can order it, you give me a deposit", but his primary purpose is to sell guns.

Mayor Becker noted the application was extremely thorough and the planning board recommended approval of the amendment.

Ms. Brooks concurred the planning board unanimously recommended approval. Ms. Brooks clarified the text amendment would affect not only Mr. Nolan, but anybody in the RA20 zoning district.

Mr. Nolan added there was one other thing he wanted to say, because it could be a point of concern. It is not easy to get an FFL, the FBI is all up your "wazoo", so it would not be like anybody in the RA20 zoning district is eligible.

Mayor Becker commented the FBI has its own licensing process that goes beyond the town, the town is just the vessel, being qualified is still going to be a separate process the applicant goes through on the federal level.

Councilwoman Critz commented it was important to note the planning board did comment on the fact that it was consistent with Mineral Springs and our purpose/goals of being more rural; there are a lot of avid hunters/gun enthusiasts.

Mayor Becker closed the Proposed Text Amendment (TA-2021-02) Public Hearing at 7:39 p.m.

3. Consideration of the Proposed Text Amendment (TA-2021-02) – Action Item

Councilwoman Neill motioned that the Statement of Reasonableness and Consistency applies, and Councilwoman Critz seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Ayes: Countryman, Critz, Cureton, Krafft, and Neill. Nays: none.

Councilwoman Neill motioned to approve the Statement of Reasonableness and Consistency and approve TA-2021-02 to allow Gunsmith by Special Use Permit in the RA20 zoning district and Councilwoman Critz seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Ayes: Countryman, Critz, Cureton, Krafft, and Neill. Nays: none.

The Statement of Reasonableness and Consistency is as follows:

Statement of Reasonableness and Consistency
Mineral Springs Unified Development Ordinance
Article 4 – Table 4.1 Permitted Uses

In reference to the proposed text amendment to Article 4 – Table 4.1 Permitted Uses of the Mineral Springs Development Ordinance inserting an "S" (Special Use Permit) to "Gunsmith (including gun and ammunition sales)", which is under Office & Service Uses in the RA20 zoning district.

The Mineral Springs Town Council hereby declares the proposed text amendment to be "*reasonable*" as it allows property owners/occupants the ability to apply for a special use permit to establish a gunsmith business in the RA20 zoning districts. The Mineral Springs Town Council recognizes a Gunsmith must follow strict rules established by the Federal Government and this is a means for property owners/occupants to add to their income.

The Mineral Springs Town Council hereby declares the proposed text amendment to be "*consistent*" with the Mineral Springs Land Use Plan adopted October 12, 2006 and the Vision Plan contained therein. The Future Land Use Plan calls for the areas now zoned RA20 to be Downtown Mixed Use, Highway Corridor, or Rural Residential (RR). Properties currently zoned RR already allows "Gunsmith" as a Special Use Permit, the Downtown Mixed-Use district is intended to become a unique retail, service and cultural, governmental, and mixed-use residential hub to serve the citizens of the town.

ADOPTED by the Mineral Springs Town Council on this the 8th day of April 2021.

Frederick Becker III, Mayor

Attest:

Vicky A. Brooks, CMC, NCCMC, CZO

4. Public Comments

Chief Donald Gaddy – Mineral Springs Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department.

5. Consent Agenda – Action Item

Councilwoman Critz motioned to approve the consent agenda containing the March 11, 2021 Regular Meeting Minutes, the February 2021 Tax Collector's Report, and the February 2021 Finance Report and Councilwoman Cureton seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Ayes: Countryman, Critz, Cureton, Krafft, and Neill. Nays: None.

6. Consideration of the Lowe's "100 Hometowns" Grant for Downtown Revitalization – Action Item

MEMO

To: Mineral Springs Town Council
From: Rick Becker
Date: March 30, 2021
Subject: Lowe's "100 Hometowns" Grant for Downtown Revitalization

Lifelong Mineral Springs resident John Howie brought to my attention the Lowe's Hometown Grant Program, which seeks to provide funding for 100 "Hometown Projects" designed to improve community resources and enable area revitalization. John believes that a project to revitalize the old Todd's Grocery property in downtown Mineral Springs by removing hazardous asbestos siding from the dilapidated buildings on the property, demolishing the buildings, fully clearing the site and regrading to remove debris, and replanting with grass would be a good candidate for one of these grants, and he would like to nominate the project for a Lowe's grant.

The nomination process for a grant is spelled out on the attached "terms and conditions" writeup, which is lengthy and contains a lot of "legalese". I have highlighted a few key provisions that would apply to Mineral Springs. In general, anybody can nominate a project for a grant, but a grant recipient must be a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit or a government entity that is capable and willing to use the grant funding to undertake the project. Projects must be able to be completed by October 31, 2021. Nominations must be submitted by April 19, 2021.

One specific suggestion under "Possible Grant Uses" is "Area Revitalization (e.g. a new playground at a community park, small business renovation/repairs, renovations to downtown areas, etc.)". That would seem to describe the proposed downtown Mineral Springs site revitalization to a "T"! And while the grant cannot be used for, say, "an individual that needs his/her home repaired" and a grant-funded project must "benefit the community as a whole", there is no prohibition on using grant funding for a project on private property. The
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Mineral Springs town council has understandably been unwilling to utilize taxpayer dollars to improve private property, but serving as a "pass through" for a private grant to improve a piece of property that would produce a demonstrable community benefit should be an appropriate municipal function.

I am working with John on his nomination. He has secured permission from the property owner to undertake the project, so I am requesting that the town council indicate by motion that the town approves of this project and would be willing to assist in coordinating the completion of the work if the nomination were selected for a grant.

There is no local match required, and no specific cost specified by Lowe's for a given project. The closest thing I could find to a monetary guideline is in one of the FAQ's, where Lowe's states that it is committing \$10 million to 100 projects – an average of \$100,000 per project. An early estimate of the cost of the downtown Mineral Springs project is \$75,000, so that certainly seems to be in line with the size project that Lowe's would be willing to fund.

Mayor Becker explained John Howie (Bill Howie's son) had contacted him about the Lowe's Hometowns Grant. It is a long shot, but since it is a private grant, it seems flexible. The way it works, if you read the fine print, they want a citizen to nominate a charity or government entity they think could undertake the project if they got the money. John Howie is the applicant (Mayor Becker has worked with him on the application a little bit) who is a motivated guy and is friends with Hal Rape; this would be a benefit to Mr. Rape. The application is strictly to pay to have the buildings and asbestos removed, to grade it flat, reseed it, and create a less dilapidated downtown to help promote the business district and improve the town.

Lowe's "100 Hometowns" grant says they are committing \$10,000,000 for 100 projects nationwide, which would be an average of \$100,000. Realtor John Maida has been interested in buying the property and has been talking to Mr. Howie to give him some information on what some of the site remediation costs would be and Mr. Maida has come up with an estimate of \$75,000 to put on the Lowe's application. Mayor Becker stated it was a long shot, but it was also a fast-track thing; the applications close next week, a decision is made within a month or two, and the project has to be done by October 31st.

The obligation of the town would be to say, "we're willing to do it and we are willing to oversee, if the money is available." The landowner has already told Mr. Howie he is happy with it. Mayor Becker explained the town would be the facilitator because that is the way the grants appear to be written, it could be a nonprofit, 501C3, or municipality, but the person who applies is supposed to be an ordinary citizen.

Attorney Griffin asked what "facilitator" means and what were the obligations.

Mayor Becker responded the Lowe's application says in their nine pages of legalese and their rules and regulations for the process there has to be "willingness of a nonprofit or government entity to facilitate and oversee the community project." The money from Lowe's pays the price of the project, but Mayor Becker (on his salary) would call the contractors and make sure it is done.

Attorney Griffin asked what the town's involvement, liability, and exposure would be if they got involved. Will the town be the one who advertises for bids?

Mayor Becker responded he would hope not.

Attorney Griffin suggested the town should understand what their role would be. "Facilitator" is a big broad word, a good word, but nevertheless how does that play out to be in practice.

Mayor Becker responded he thought if the town were going to sign a contract to receive the grant, the town would make sure Attorney Griffin read it over.

Attorney Griffin commented he was thinking what the town might want to do is to make an inquiry in advance, so there is some notion of what the council is going to commit to be done.

Councilwoman Critz commented Mayor Becker should follow through with whatever is necessary and proceed to get it done.

Mayor Becker responded the council could say “go forward”, but Mr. Howie has to apply by April 19th. If it looks like the project gets approved, Mayor Becker thought he would continue to keep an eye on it. Mayor Becker did not know what Lowe’s was going to do or how they were going to notify people; Mr. Howie is the contact.

Mayor Becker agreed with Attorney Griffin, the town needs to know what they are doing, because the town would probably be subject to the usual municipal bidding process.

Councilwoman Critz stated she read through it and her thought was (on page 5 item 6) that “Judging and selection of grant recipients that the application is really the only thing that’s going before them in what they call the first round.” Councilwoman Critz guessed they would take however many they get and narrow it down. The second round says, “those judges will score and rate the submissions at the Lowe’s sole and absolute discretion based on the following criteria”, and then it says, “a balanced number of community projects in urban/rural communities”, “disperse geographical reach across the United States”, “cultural and socioeconomical diversity of the communities served”, and then it ends with “willingness of a nonprofit or government entity to facilitate and oversee the community project.”

Attorney Griffin referred to the top of page 7 and 9 where it says, “shall not be held responsible for any delays in awarding or fulfilling a grant or completing a project for any reason” and said he liked what it said, but he has not really read through it until now. Attorney Griffin commented he assumed that would be the town. On page 9 it says, “release and agree to indemnify and hold harmless”, which are good things to have.

Mayor Becker commented if it came to the second round, he thought they would ask for more input from the town and if the town were willing to handle it, that would be when the town attorney would have to really read over anything the town was going to sign. Mayor Becker suggested, at this early stage, the council just needed to be able to basically say they would be willing to go to the next step if Mr. Howie makes the application and gets selected for the next step. “The council just has to express their willingness to accept Mr. Howie’s interest in doing this”, Mayor Becker said.

Councilwoman Critz motioned that we move forward with this grant and that if we get to phase two, we will be sure that all those “i’s” are dotted, and “t’s” are crossed, and Councilwoman Neill seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Ayes: Countryman, Critz, Cureton, Krafft, and Neill. Nays: None.

7. Consideration of Returning to Town Hall for Monthly Meetings and Reopening Town Hall During Normal Business Hours – Action Item

MEMO

To: Town Council
From: Vicky Brooks
Date: April 1, 2021
Re: Agenda Item # 7 – Consideration of Returning to Town Hall for Monthly Meetings and Reopening Town Hall During Normal Business Hours

In April of 2020, the town council passed a resolution allowing electronic meetings. It is my belief that the town council should not pass a resolution suspending that resolution at this time, because there may be a need to have electronic meetings in the future depending on COVID-19 surges. There are reports that a surge is taking place now, so we do need to proceed with caution and follow any Executive Order issued by Governor Cooper under the State of Emergency.

There will be a public hearing at the next two monthly meetings (May and June). In July of 2020, the council decided by unanimous vote to have town hall open by appointment only with anyone coming having their temperature checked, filling out a questionnaire, and wearing a mask. This procedure has been working well during this period; however, it is up to the council whether you want to keep that procedure in place or to open town hall up to the public, so people can just come in when they want during normal business hours. Of course, we would want to keep the COVID-19 safety features in place (temperature, questionnaire, mask) if we open back up to the public.

Mayor Becker explained the council would discuss regular monthly meetings and day-to-day office hours.

Councilman Countryman asked if there was any objection to coming back into town hall and working with an open door.

Ms. Brooks responded that Ms. Ridings and herself have been at town hall every Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday anyway, but the door is locked.

Councilman Countryman asked if all business transactions were by appointment only.

Ms. Brooks responded they are, but she is still doing a lot digitally, because people have gotten into that kind of routine. Ms. Brooks explained when she had to sign a plat, people would call her and say they were coming sometimes, but sometimes they would just show up and she would work with them. Ms. Brooks commented it was up to the council whether they wanted the door to be unlocked when staff is at town hall.

Councilman Countryman responded it had a lot to do with how staff felt about it too.

Ms. Brooks noted if only one staff member is at town hall the door remains locked. Ms. Brooks explained prior to the pandemic when Ms. Ridings and she were at town hall the door was open and people could just walk in. Since Ms. Ridings is the first person to see somebody that comes in the door, the council may want to ask her how she feels about it.

Ms. Ridings responded she was fine, whatever Ms. Brooks would like is okay with her.

Councilman Countryman stated he thought the door should be open, because "we're at a stage where we need to open it back".

Ms. Ridings explained there is not a lot of traffic anyway, Ms. Brooks is doing a lot more things over email, the phone, and digitally; business has not stopped because of that. Ms. Ridings stated she was okay with it.

Councilman Countryman asked Ms. Brooks if she was okay with it.

Ms. Brooks responded sure.

Councilman Countryman motioned that we open it back up, open the town hall for routine business and Councilwoman Cureton seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Ayes: Countryman, Critz, Cureton, Krafft, and Neill. Nays: None.

Councilwoman Critz motioned to continue to meet at the town hall for our monthly meetings and Councilwoman Neill seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Ayes: Countryman, Critz, Cureton, Krafft, and Neill. Nays: None.

Councilwoman Krafft suggested the council leave it open, so that if there is a surge that the council can go back, because surges are coming.

Mayor Becker responded he was concerned, but he wanted to ask Attorney Griffin if there was something that changed, was there some legislation about a local State of Emergency where the town could make a decision.

Attorney Griffin responded he was not sure, the headlines/reports were that they are considering various bills to take emergency powers away from the governor and locals too. Attorney Griffin was not sure what had passed and what had not.

Mayor Becker commented there was still the county State of Emergency, which the town has kept in effect, so he thought the town had latitude in the State of Emergency to close town hall again.

Councilwoman Krafft mentioned the number of COVID instances in Union County are up.

Mayor Becker agreed the town needed to be careful and we do have the option to immediately say "no, we are going to do the meetings by ZOOM again", the option is there during a State of Emergency. The town did adopt a resolution authorizing the council to do remote meetings, so that is kind of an ongoing authority.

Ms. Brooks agreed that would be correct until the council rescinds the resolution. Ms. Brooks asked if next month the surge goes way up and staff thinks that it may not be in the best interest of the public, staff, council to come to town hall for the meeting, would that call be up to the council or staff based on what is being read on the surge.

Mayor Becker explained the town has been doing what the county does and they are having in person meetings.

There was further discussion on what to do if a surge occurred and the town needed to go back to meeting via ZOOM.

Councilwoman Critz motioned that we continue to meet in person and that it can be rescinded if the protocol from the emergency services in Union County change, we can rescind meeting in person and go back to ZOOM if necessary and Councilman Countryman seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Ayes: Countryman, Critz, Cureton, Krafft, and Neill. Nays: None.

8. Consideration of Requesting Benchmark Planning to Begin Working with the Town to Rewrite the Land Use Plan – Action Item

Ms. Brooks explained the current Land Use Plan (LUP) was adopted in May of 2006 and there are many actions in that plan that have already been accomplished. In addition, the current LUP specifically refers to the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances, which the town no longer has; it is now a Unified Development Ordinance. The new 160D-501(A) says that the town must adopt a comprehensive plan or LUP by July 2022 and that plan must be reasonably maintained. Ms. Brooks stated since the last plan was [adopted] in 2006, it had a few issues in itself, and it was time for the town to work with someone to update the LUP. Ms. Brooks recommended Benchmark Planning, who are the same people who did all the zoning changes; however, if the council thinks she should ask other planning companies she could do that. Ms. Brooks does feel comfortable working with Benchmark, believes they will do a good job, and feels they will listen as long as she knows what to tell them.

For clarification, Ms. Brooks explained this was just a very early stage of getting Benchmark Planning to give the town a quote for their service. The actual process of updating the LUP will go through the planning board [and town council].

Councilwoman Krafft noted the heart of the LUP has not changed, it just needs to be updated. The last thing the town did with Benchmark Planning there were some things Councilwoman Krafft did not feel like they necessarily listened to the town about; they kind of went their own way.

Ms. Brooks added the town will probably want to come up with more goals and actions in the new plan, which will be in the scope.

Councilwoman Critz asked staff to make the council copies of the current LUP, so they could do a cursory view of it.

Councilwoman Krafft suggested getting a quote from Benchmark and someone else, so the council will have at least two to compare.

Ms. Brooks suggested N-Focus was a good planning company, as well as Centralina Council of Governments (COG).

Councilwoman Krafft asked if COG was who Nadine worked with.

Ms. Brooks responded yes.

Mayor Becker added Nadine is now working with N-Focus.

Councilwoman Krafft stated Nadine had the “heart of us”, she did not try to change the town, she tried to accept the town, and work with the town. Councilwoman Krafft did not get that impression with the last person.

Councilman Countryman suggested getting bids from both companies.

Councilwoman Critz added to specifically ask for Nadine at N-Focus.

Councilwoman Krafft motioned that Ms. Brooks get two quotes from the two different companies, Benchmark and N-Focus and specifically ask for Nadine Bennett at N-Focus to revise our Land Use Plan, so it fits the new criteria and Councilman Countryman seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Ayes: Countryman, Critz, Cureton, Krafft, and Neill. Nays: None.

9. Consideration of Appointing a Delegate for the NCLM 2021-2022 League Board of Directors – Action Item

Mayor Becker asked Councilwoman Neill if she would be the delegate for voting for the League Board of Directors.

Councilwoman Neil responded, “of course, I’ll do it.”

Councilman Countryman motioned to appoint Councilwoman Neill to take the vote for the North Carolina League Board of Directors and Councilwoman Cureton seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Ayes: Countryman, Critz, Cureton, Krafft, and Neill. Nays: None.

10. FY2021-2022 Budget: Preliminary Departmental Appropriations – Action Item

MEMO

To: Mineral Springs Town Council
From: Rick Becker
Date: March 29, 2021
Subject: FY2021-2022 Budget: Preliminary Departmental Appropriations

The accompanying spreadsheet shows the FY2019-20 final budget and actual expenditures, the FY2020-21 current budget and estimated final actual expenditures, and suggested appropriation levels for the FY2021-22 budget.

I am recommending keeping most proposed expenditures the same as last year's except for the usual salary and hourly wage increases and other items that change based on established formulas or trends. This "first draft" suggests an increase of \$4,091 over the current year's operating expenditure budget, or 1.24%. This figure again reflects the 3% increase in staff salaries that council has consistently approved over the past several years. This presents a more accurate estimate of what the budget officer anticipates happening with these salaries, but council must still decide whether or not to apply any increases. Note that the "Assistant/Deputy" position has increased from a \$11,500 budget amount to \$12,300; this is not a salaried position, and the \$12,300 is a maximum suggested allocation for the position. Currently, this position requires 12 hours per week, corresponding to the time the town hall is open for regular business hours. The hourly rate for this position is currently \$18.45.

Reading the Chart

In the right-hand column, headed "2021-22 proposed", bold-faced numbers are the totals within each budgetary department. These numbers add up to the total of \$333,166. These are the categories that ultimately end up in the adopted budget ordinance and within which the town must operate; numbers within these departments are "flexible," and may be changed during the fiscal year as needed without budget amendments as long as the departmental totals in the ordinance are not increased. Salaries are shown in white, reflecting amounts 3% above last fiscal year. "Employee Overhead" is also shown in white and is proposed to increase by \$2,500 next year. The three sets of figures in the "dotted" cells are simply sub-subcategories within subcategories.

Increases and Decreases

Most other line items are very close to last year's. Although we are still operating under some limitations as a result of COVID-19 I am recommending that we establish the budget as if things were *almost* "back to normal" starting on July 1, 2021 – with the exception of the September 2021 Festival which has been canceled. An amount in the budget does NOT have to result in an expenditure but budgeting all items as usual provides taxpayers with the most realistic idea of the maximum amount the town is likely to spend in the next fiscal year. Major changes in proposed expenditures are:

1. "Charities": Based on 3% of previous fiscal year budget, per town policy. Decreased from \$10,825 to \$10,545.
2. "Community – Special Events: Festival": The 2021 Festival has already been canceled, but as the fiscal year progresses and more certainty emerges on the COVID front there may be opportunities to operate some "scaled-back" festive events. Keeping an appropriation in place would allow such events to be funded without amending the budget. Decreased from \$10,000 to \$5,000.
3. "Elections": There will be a municipal election in 2021, so this appropriation is increased from \$0 to \$3,300.
4. "Employee Overhead": The NC Local Government Employees' Retirement System contribution rate has increased, and any salary increases will also result in additional increases in LGERS, FICA, and Workers Compensation contributions. There have been small increases in the NCLM benefits as well. Increased from \$30,200 to \$35,000.
5. "Planning – Zoning Ordinance": Some changes to the UDO that will bring it into compliance with new NC G.S. Chapter 160D requirements are currently being undertaken. There may be some additional changes to be made as the UDO is reviewed by planning staff and the planning board. No Change from \$5,000.
6. "Planning – Land Use Plans": The planning director is recommending updating and revising the Comprehensive plan, currently called the Land Use Plan. Funds have been allocated each year for this effort but a new plan has not yet been developed. This appropriation has been unused in prior years, but in light of the more pressing need for the Comprehensive Plan we will likely need these funds in FY2021-22. No Change from \$5,000.

Other Items of Note:

Most other line items and departmental appropriations remain very close to FY2020-21 levels. The budget amounts approved by council in recent years appear to be representing the town's overall spending priorities quite well, and as such there is no need to modify those budget amounts.

At the April 8, 2021 meeting, council should consider three items related to the budget:

1. determine salary and hourly figures for next year
2. decide on whether or not to include any of the proposed changes in the FY2021-22 budget
3. advise the budget officer of any changes council might wish to make to other appropriations so that the formal proposed budget may be presented to council in May.

Mayor Becker explained he tried to keep the budget the same as last year; revenues are not being budgeted yet, because he has not gone through the new tax evaluation process. Mayor Becker noted the town was not having the festival this September, which would be on the upcoming budget, but he did leave funding for something (maybe a Christmas Tree Lighting, ice cream social in the spring) in that category, so there is funding appropriated if the council thinks the town should pursue something on a smaller scale. Everything else is very much the same. Next month, the council will get the proposed budget with a revenue neutral tax rate, which will probably be about two cents; it is up to the council if they want to accept that, and the budget would be the same dollar amount as it has been with an increase based on growth and inflation. This is done every time there is a

reevaluation. Mayor Becker asked the council if they saw any glaring things that were wrong with the preliminary departmental appropriations or if they wanted to change anything. Mayor Becker pointed out the council had three things to do: determine the salary and hourly figures, and decide if they wanted to change anything.

Councilwoman Critz asked if the council always based their decision on salary increases on cost of living.

Mayor Becker responded they have always been a little above because it is a combination of merit/cost of living; everyone has been getting 3% for the past few years and cost of living might be 1.5%.

Councilwoman Cureton asked if Councilwoman Critz meant in other words she thought the council could get a raise.

Councilwoman Critz responded she was referring to the staff and getting a cost of living raise on their salaries, she was not referring to the council, but she was very open to what Councilwoman Cureton might add.

Councilwoman Cureton stated, "I deserve a raise, I don't know about you all, you may not need it or want it, but I think a raise would be fine".

Mayor Becker explained council salaries are different from staff salaries in terms of how they are set, but that was a council decision; they are basically an honorarium, no one is living on \$150 a month. It is a stipend.

Councilwoman Critz stated she would call other similar municipalities to get a comparison on the salaries of their council members and then the council could decide if they wanted to take a percentage of that or not change it at all.

Councilwoman Cureton noted Councilwoman Critz would be shocked and the council would not get the same thing as other towns, because they would never approve it.

Mayor Becker responded unless he heard otherwise, he would keep it in the recommended budget, because the council will be discussing it next month. If the council comes up with some suggestions to change the council salaries that could go into the final adopted budget in June. Mayor Becker asked that Councilwoman Critz take the initiative to look into council salaries since Councilwoman Cureton wanted her to. Mayor Becker noted he knew the council salaries have been on the low side and pointed out the council has one meeting a month and some towns have two. Mayor Becker stated the council members have been easy on the taxpayers in terms of what they have asked for in a stipend.

Councilwoman Krafft asked if we knew what the tax rates in Union County were going to be.

Mayor Becker responded no, because the county is doing exactly what Mineral Springs is doing, they are not going to set a tax rate, there will probably be a recommended tax rate from the manager coming out in May, just like Mineral Springs will. It will be lower obviously because the evaluations are high. The county may not even have a firm presentation of the recommended tax rate when Mineral Springs presents the budget in May, because of the size of the county budget they are going to be fighting it out for quite a while. The county commissioners meet twice a month, plus they will have separate budget workshops and those mostly are all available online (they are streamed) and that can be helpful. Sometimes it is better just to see the document, so you can read it, because while they are deliberating it gets confusing because their budget is so big.

Councilwoman Critz stated she thought it was worth looking into for the sake of our community, the evaluations were needed, but we are in a position right now of not having enough houses. There is a shortage of houses because we have more people wanting houses. "You see all the building around you and think how in the world could that possibly be, but I heard recently from, I think it was Dean Arp, I'm not going to say it was for sure, but from one of the legislators, North Carolina Legislators, that they've literally proven that we are in a housing shortage", Councilwoman Critz said. Houses are selling way above normal prices because there is a shortage, so there are bidding wars. "There was a house in our community that sold for like \$60,000 above the asking price because they got in a bidding war and so we have an unusual situation I believe, of having maybe not a realistic housing market right now, so I think for the sake of our community we might need to watch what the commissioners are doing with the rate", Councilwoman Critz said.

Mayor Becker commented the tax values had already been set based on sales six months to a year ago and it has been accelerating since then, so it would not surprise him if the revaluation rates right now were going to be low, because prices are sometimes surpassing the new values, because the new values have come out, but there is nothing that can be done about it.

Mayor Becker explained there were two separate things: actual retail and the tax value and those are different. The tax values have gone up a lot for most everybody. Mineral Springs tax rate is 2.5 cents. Mayor Becker noted he got an estimate from the county last week for Mineral Springs alone and thought if the town dropped the tax rate to 2 cents that would be close to revenue neutral and that would be close to the same income for the town. Mayor Becker stated he would have to do a much more careful calculation when he presented the budget; the county will be required to do the same thing. The county will be using those revaluation numbers, they are not going on sales taking place now, plus there will be appeals, so some of them are being lowered.

Councilwoman Krafft commented when the guy did the presentation, he said the revaluations were going to be an average of 30 to 35%.

Mayor Becker responded that was what they did in Mineral Springs based on what our total is, it was something like \$270,000,000 and for the total real property valuation it is now close to \$400,000,000. Mineral Springs has gone up over \$100,000,000, which is about 30%. If Mineral Springs does not roll the rate back, keeping it at 2.5 cents, Mayor Becker did a calculation based on the number he got from the county and it would be approximately \$94,000 in property tax a year, which is up from \$66,000 for the current year on real property, so it is has gone up 30%. Vehicle taxes are separate and are taxed at the same rate, but their values have not gone up, so that will have to be built into the tax rate, because the town could undercut itself on vehicles. In Mineral Springs, vehicles are approximately \$30,000,000 in total value. In summary, if the rate is kept at 2.5 cents the town would bring in approximately \$94,000 and that would be a \$30,000 a year increase. Mayor Becker explained he would be presenting the council with a budget that keeps it the same and be able to pay for the appropriations the council is looking at.

Councilwoman Krafft thought it would be a better idea if the rate is 2.5 cents to just cut it a little and not go straight to 2 cents, so that there is a little increase in the revenue, but not too much. This would give the town extra income for the projects the town wants to do for the community as it develops.

Mayor Becker responded the town has always cut the tax rate whenever there was a revaluation. It went from 4 cents in 1999 to 3 cents with the first revaluation and then it went to 2.5 cents. Mayor Becker stated Councilwoman Krafft made a good point, because it is not a big dollar amount for the taxpayers. As an example, Mayor Becker explained a house worth \$200,000 would be paying \$50 annually to Mineral Springs, if the revaluation increased the house to \$300,000, that would be a

50% increase making their Mineral Springs tax \$75 annually “if we didn’t lower it, so we are beating up our taxpayers with it”, Mayor Becker said.

Councilwoman Critz asked Mayor Becker to provide the council with the current rate so they could look at it and either stay with it and use it as a savings towards a future project the town wants to do (community center) or they could cut it back.

Mayor Becker responded he was required to do revenue neutral calculations by law, but he would look at what Councilwoman Krafft was saying and recommend a rate that is above revenue neutral, but he will look to see what the council has done in the past.

Councilwoman Krafft stated, “we’re not asking to raise it all”.

Mayor Becker responded no. The council just wants to make sure they are respecting the concerns of the taxpayers. A lot of taxpayers forgot this was done five years ago by the county, but people just got that whooping big revaluation number, and they think their taxes are going to go up. If the county taxes are 80 cents and Mineral Springs is 2.5 cents, that is a big dollar amount to the taxpayer. The town does have to be careful to be respectful of those concerns and make sure they are aware of what people are worried about in terms of tax increases. Mayor Becker concurred with Councilwoman Krafft, that the town did not have to go to zero.

Councilwoman Krafft stated she was all for saving money, but the council could come to a compromise and be able to put some money back for the big projects that the town really wants to do for the community.

Mayor Becker explained that would be on the capital side, which is what is left over after all the bills are paid. That amount has been going down every year for the past two or three years, because the town has not raised the rate and there has not been much increase in other taxes. The town is picking up the slack by cutting the capital each time; that amount is down to \$25,000 and maybe it should go back up to \$40,000.

Mayor Becker asked for a motion on the 3% recommendation on the staff salaries.

Councilwoman Critz stated she would do the research on the council salaries.

Councilwoman Critz motioned to keep the staff salary increases at 3% and Councilwoman Krafft seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Ayes: Countryman, Critz, Cureton, Krafft, and Neill. Nays: None.

11. Staff Updates

There were no staff reports.

12. Other Business

Councilwoman Critz mentioned a house on McNeely Road that she had been talking to Ms. Brooks and Councilwoman Neill about. Councilwoman Critz also submitted some photographs to Ms. Brooks. Councilwoman Critz explained there were a lot of violations: boats, jet skis, a million trucks with trailers hooked to them like they are construction; and then they have a building. All of this is in front of the house. Some of these things would be fine in the side or rear, but this is “like really way out of and very overwhelming.” Councilwoman Critz stated she did not know how many people were living in the house (it is not necessarily the town’s concern), but there are multiple violations of stuff in the front and side yards. Councilwoman Critz noted she brought this to the attention of the council, because she thought “it is something we should action upon.”

Councilwoman Cureton suggested checking out the house right beside her. Councilwoman Cureton explained she had to call Chief Gaddy after the people that own the house came out and made a fire and left it burning; the firemen put it out. Councilwoman Cureton stated she had eleven mice in her house, so she had to do all her vents and seal up everything, so they do not come in; everybody out there has been having a problem. "It's worse as anything you could see, but I'd like to buy it, but he won't sell it", Councilwoman Cureton stated.

Councilwoman Cureton thanked everybody who donated money to the Mr. Brown dedication that was done on the 27th; it was really nice and the mayor was there. Councilwoman Cureton has some DVD's if anyone would like to buy one for \$10.

Councilwoman Critz mentioned a bogus email from Mr. Krafft concerning Zooming this meeting, and stated the town needed to see what was going on.

Councilwoman Krafft responded the funny part was that Mr. Krafft was not even awake yet when it the email went through.

Councilwoman Critz stated her point was "all of us" individually get bogus things, but this seems to be sponsored by the town.

Mayor Becker responded, "we have to be aware of those kinds of spoofs, because they are getting group email addresses, some of that is visible to somebody who's had an email." Mayor Becker suggested everyone just has to be careful what they click on.

Councilwoman Neill commented it was so legitimate that she had to call Councilwoman Critz to ask if something was going on that she didn't know about.

Councilwoman Neill asked Ms. Brooks when was the last time they had a newsletter.

Ms. Brooks responded, "last festival."

Councilwoman Neill asked the council if they thought it might be time for a newsletter; there are a lot of things to highlight (new businesses, expansions). Councilwoman Neill stated she did not want to add to Ms. Brooks workload, but it has been a while.

Councilwoman Critz suggested the newsletter could let people know what the council is doing; trying to meet in person as long as they can safely.

Mayor Becker asked Ms. Brooks if she had any thoughts on it, he knew she wanted to do a newsletter since she had mentioned it to him a couple of times.

Attorney Griffin commented in some other towns the mayor does it [newsletter].

Ms. Brooks explained it had been a trying and busy year for her and the newsletter was always at the bottom of her list.

Councilwoman Critz asked if it was the putting it together, getting enough, or the actual function of doing it. The council could volunteer to write articles if that would be helpful.

Ms. Brooks responded sometimes having volunteers do something makes the work harder for her.

Councilwoman Critz suggested Ms. Brooks talk about it and get back to the council, because they could help with articles possibly.

13. Adjournment – Action Item

At 8:47 p.m. Councilwoman Critz motioned to adjourn the meeting and Councilwoman Neill seconded. The motion passed unanimously. Ayes: Countryman, Critz, Cureton, Krafft, and Neill. Nays: None.

The next regular meeting will be on Thursday, May 13, 2021 at 7:30 p.m. at the Mineral Springs Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted by:

The seal is circular with a double-line border. The outer ring contains the text "TOWN OF MINERAL SPRINGS" at the top and "UNION COUNTY, N.C." at the bottom, separated by two stars. The center of the seal features the text "EST. SEAL 1999" in a bold, sans-serif font.


Vicky A. Brooks, CMC, NCCMC, Town Clerk


Frederick Becker III, Mayor