MINUTES – REGULAR MEETING
BOONE TOWN COUNCIL
FEBRUARY 26, 2025

CALL TO ORDER

A regular meeting of the Boone Town Council was called to order at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, February 26, 2025, in the Boone Town Council Chambers located at 1500 Blowing Rock Road in Boone. Mayor Tim Futrelle presided. Council members present included Mayor Pro-Tem Dalton George, Virginia Roseman, Todd Carter (remote), Edie Tugman, and Eric Plaag. Town staff present included Town Manager Amy Davis, Town Clerk Nicole Harmon-Church, Public Works Director Todd Moody, Planning Director Jane Shook, Deputy Planning Director Brandon Wise, Interim Police Chief Daniel Duckworth, Sustainability and Special Projects Manager George Santucci, Finance Director Guy Miller, Cultural Resources Director Mark Freed. Town Attorney Allison Meade was also in attendance.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mayor Pro-Tem George made a motion to amend the agenda to consider resolutions and proclamations before the lobbyists gave their report. Council member Roseman seconded this motion, which carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF PROCLAMATIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

Mayor Pro-Tem George made a motion to approve the proclamation honoring H.C. Moretz. Council Member Roseman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Mayor Pro-Tem George expressed gratitude to Mr. Moretz's family for their presence at the meeting and commended the numerous achievements throughout his distinguished life. He then read the following proclamation into the record:

PROCLAMATION HONORING THE LIFE OF

HERBERT CLEVLAND (H.C.) MORETZ, JR. AND DECLARING A DAY IN HIS NAME

Whereas, the Boone, North Carolina community mourns the loss of a beloved centenarian and respected citizen, Herbert Clevland (H.C.) Moretz, Jr., who passed away peacefully at his home on January 9, 2025, at the age of 100 ½; and

Whereas, H.C. Moretz was born on March 14, 1924, to the late Herbert Clevland, Sr.,

and Pearl Carpenter Moretz, and grew to exemplify the values of service, dedication, and community leadership throughout his long and remarkable life; and

Whereas, H.C. proudly served his country as a member of the "Greatest Generation", bravely fighting in World War II as part of the 78th Lightning Division Infantry of the U.S. Army. H.C. demonstrated extraordinary courage during the Battle of the Bulge, where he was wounded on his 20th birthday and earned the Purple Heart, embodying the highest ideals of patriotism and sacrifice; and

Whereas, after returning from the war, H.C. pursued higher education at Appalachian State Teacher's College, earning a Bachelor's Degree in Business and Social Studies, and went on to touch the lives of countless students as a business education teacher at West Yadkin High School and as manager of Elkin Business College; and

Whereas, H.C.'s commitment to service extended beyond education and into the community as he served as the director of the Neighborhood Youth Corps program and later as the Executive Director of W.A.M.Y. Community Action for over two decades. During his long and fruitful career here, H.C. spearheaded initiatives that enriched the lives of many, including the development of Appalcart, the introduction of the public school breakfast program, and the implementation of the Head Start and WIC programs to name only a few; and

Whereas, H.C.'s dedication and contributions to his community and state were recognized with numerous accolades, including the prestigious Order of the Long Leaf Pine, one of North Carolina's highest honors, awarded to him on June 10, 2012; and

Whereas, H.C. was a devoted family man, a loving husband to his late wife of 65 years, Phyllis Wilson Moretz, and a cherished father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, whose legacy continues through his four children, eight grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren; and

Whereas, H.C. enriched the lives of those around him with his passion for family, his love for games like cornhole and solitaire, his faithful membership at Bethany Lutheran Church, and joyfully continued his wife's tradition of baking homemade yeast bread;

Now, therefore, be it resolved that we, the members of the Boone Town Council, honor and celebrate the remarkable life and enduring legacy of Herbert Clevland (H.C.) Moretz, Jr., whose contributions to his family, country, and community will forever be remembered and declare_____day of (Month) to be HERBERT CLEVLAND (H.C.) MORETZ, JR. day; and

Be it further resolved that a copy of this resolution be presented to the family of H.C. Moretz as a testament to his remarkable life and lasting impact.

Adopted this on the_____day of February 2025.

_____
Mayor Tim Futrelle

ATTEST:

_____(SEAL)
Nicole Harmon-Church, Town Clerk

LOBBYIST UPDATE

Nathan Honaker, State Lobbyist with Connect C, reported that the primary concern across the state remained the ongoing Helene relief efforts in the western part of the state. Since last year, he stated that there had been an election. However, the overall political landscape in Raleigh had seen little change, and the General Assembly still had a Republican majority in both chambers. Mr. Honaker explained that the Senate maintained a Republican supermajority while the House lost its supermajority by one vote. This shift meant Republicans would need at least one Democratic vote to override a gubernatorial veto, encouraging more bipartisan collaboration on policy matters.

In the executive branch, Mr. Honaker reported that there had been significant personnel changes, with seven out of ten members of the Council of State being newly elected, including the governor, attorney general, lieutenant governor, labor commissioner, treasurer, auditor, and superintendent. Despite these changes, the partisan balance remained relatively the same, shifting from a 6-4 Republican majority to an even 5-5 split, reflecting North Carolina's historically balanced political landscape.

Mr. Honaker indicated that the judicial branch had seen minimal changes in power dynamics. However, one unresolved Supreme Court race remained under litigation. The Democratic incumbent won the initial tally, but the Republican challenger has contested

certain votes. He reported that the case was before the Court of Appeals, and while a resolution was hoped for soon, it may take considerable time to finalize.

The legal dispute over the unresolved Supreme Court race remains ongoing, according to Mr. Honaker, and depending on the state court's ruling, it could potentially advance to federal court, prolonging the process.

Mr. Honaker said that legislative activities were in full swing at the General Assembly. Committees were appointed, leadership convened, and early budget discussions were underway. He indicated that senior budget chairs in the House and Senate were meeting behind closed doors to negotiate the framework. Additionally, Mr. Honaker said that the first draft of a Helene relief package had progressed through the legislative process. He stated that the House unanimously approved the bill, which would now move to the Senate for consideration. While some modifications may be made, he believed bipartisan unity remained strong, with all branches of government and North Carolina's congressional delegation prioritizing relief efforts for western North Carolina. His view was that the expectation remained that some version of the package would pass in the near future.

Mr. Honaker explained that the House's version of the relief bill, while not final, reflected key priorities that the Senate was expected to share. He indicated that the state had allocated approximately $1.4 billion from its reserve fund, commonly referred to as the "rainy day fund," built up over the past decade from budget surpluses. The current bill allocated $500 million of that total, including $125 million for home reconstruction and repair to supplement FEMA assistance. Additionally, $150 million has been designated for the North Carolina Department of Agriculture, with half allocated for crop loss recovery and the other half for stream restoration and infrastructure essential to agricultural operations.

Mr. Honaker added that the Helene relief package also included $100 million to repair private roads and bridges, addressing gaps in federal coverage under current guidelines. This funding was essential for many counties in the western part of the state where the state must step in to support these infrastructure repairs.

Additionally, he stated that $55 million had been allocated to the Small Business Infrastructure Grant Program. Unlike revenue loss assistance, this funding would go to support critical infrastructure such as sidewalks, utilities, and water systems. Mr. Honaker said that both local governments and individual businesses would be eligible to apply if this program remained in the final version of the bill.

Mr. Honaker indicated that another major component of the package was funding for debris removal, a pressing need in the region. He stated that a significant amount of debris remained, with complicated federal and state regulations governing its disposal due to hazardous materials mixed with natural debris. Mr. Honaker added that the initial bill

included $20 million for this effort, though additional funding may be necessary. Federal support was also expected to contribute to this process.

He stated that non-profit organizations, which played a crucial role in initial disaster response efforts, would receive $10 million through the Governor's Office of Emergency Management for reimbursement of expenses. Additionally, he said $15 million would be allocated to the Golden LEAF Foundation to provide small grants (up to $50,000) for nonprofit organizations assisting in western North Carolina's recovery.

According to Mr. Honaker, the bill also designated $10 million for the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to supplement federal rental assistance programs, addressing gaps where federal support falls short. Furthermore, recognizing the importance of tourism to the regional economy, the bill included $5 million for travel and tourism marketing. He indicated that the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC) would oversee this initiative to counter misconceptions that the region remained closed due to storm damage.

While this is the House's version of the relief package, Mr. Honaker stated that the Senate shared many of these priorities. Both chambers agreed on the importance of small business relief, debris removal, and agricultural support. He indicated that the final negotiations would determine the specific funding allocations. Still, he stated there was a strong bipartisan consensus on the need to act swiftly and collaborate with federal partners to ensure effective recovery efforts.

Mr. Honaker added that efforts to advance Helene recovery and relief remained a priority. As lobbyists, he promised that he and his firm would work closely with Manager Davis and the Town Council to ensure Boone had the necessary information to take advantage of available funding programs. In some cases, Mr. Honaker indicated that his firm could provide guidance before it was officially released, allowing the Town to prepare and maximize its share of available resources for local recovery and development.

Beyond Helene relief, Mr. Honaker noted that his firm's advocacy for Town funding at the state level continued. Even before the disaster, he indicated that they worked to secure the financing of various projects and achieved notable success in 2020 with the support of Senator Hise, Representative Pickett, and legislative leaders in both parties. He stated they remained committed to advocating for local projects; however, this year's state budget presented challenges.

While the current fiscal year had a $500 million surplus, he noted that this was relatively small in the context of state government. Revenue projections indicated a flat budget next year, with a possible deficit the following year. As a result, Mr. Honaker predicted that funding opportunities may be more limited. However, he reassured that there were designated funds for disaster recovery, which increased the likelihood of securing support for projects related to hurricane relief. Mr. Honaker added that he and his firm would

continue working with state representatives and local leaders to explore funding opportunities, including ongoing support for infrastructure projects and cultural initiatives such as "Horn in the West," which received funding in last year's budget.

Regarding the legislative timeline, Mr. Honaker stated that the Senate was leading the budget process this year and aimed to pass a budget by April 18, before taking a brief recess for Easter. He added that the budget would then move to the House for consideration. While budget negotiations could extend beyond the intended schedule, given the pressing funding needs across the state, a budget bill was expected to be passed during this legislative session. Mr. Honaker and his team will continue to monitor developments and provide updates as the process unfolds.

While the goal was to finalize the state budget by July 1, it was Mr. Honaker's opinion that experience suggested that it would likely be delayed, with completion more realistically expected in late summer or early fall. Historically, budget negotiations often stalled due to policy debates on issues such as casinos or other legislative matters that may not directly relate to state funding but still impact revenue. He believed internal disagreements among Republican lawmakers could also contribute to delays.

Next, Lobbyist Brad Edwards, with Jenkins Hill Consulting, provided an update on the current political landscape in Washington, noting the recent changes in administration and shifts in party control. He explained that while the Senate transitioned from Democrat to Republican control, the House remained under a slim Republican majority, which has led to increased negotiations and complexities in governance. According to Mr. Edwards, one of the key issues being addressed was funding the federal government for the fiscal year 2025, initially due September 30 but has been repeatedly postponed, now set for resolution by March 14. He noted that negotiators from the top appropriations committees were working toward a funding agreement, which was expected to include disaster relief for recent events such as the Helene disaster and California wildfires. Additionally, he indicated that the debt ceiling, which was typically addressed every two years, was another pressing concern, with the president seeking a four-year extension. According to Mr. Edwards, these issues present significant legislative challenges and will require extensive negotiations in the coming weeks.

Mr. Edwards further explained that despite the Republican trifecta controlling the presidency, House, and Senate, it was not a fully functional majority due to internal divisions within the party. In the House, he noted that Republicans held only a narrow one- to three-seat majority, making consensus difficult. Meanwhile, in the Senate, most legislation required 60 votes to proceed, necessitating bipartisan support. Regarding the appropriations process, he stated that Congress must either pass a full funding bill by September 30 or rely on short-term continuing resolutions (CRs) to keep the government running until an omnibus bill is agreed upon. Mr. Edwards stated that given the ongoing negotiations around disaster funding, the March 14 deadline, and the debt ceiling, it

appears unlikely that Congress will pass a full-year funding bill. Mr. Edwards also highlighted the budget reconciliation process, which allowed for certain legislation to pass with a simple majority. Recently, the Senate passed an immigration and energy reconciliation package, with the House following suit the previous night. Lawmakers must now reconcile differences between the versions and determine whether to proceed with a two- or three-bill approach. Mr. Edwards noted that the president's stance on the matter has varied, and further discussions would shape how Congress moves forward.

Mr. Edwards elaborated on the reconciliation process, which allowed legislation to pass with a simple majority—requiring only 51 votes in the Senate, with the vice president able to cast a tie-breaking vote if necessary. He noted that current reconciliation efforts aimed to make the tax cuts from the 2018 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act permanent, implement immigration reforms with additional funding, and expand energy opportunities while reassessing alternative energy policies. Mr. Edwards stated that lawmakers must identify spending cuts to offset costs, which would be a key point of contention. He predicted that Congress would likely approve a short-term continuing resolution into April rather than reaching a full funding agreement by the March 14 deadline. This would maintain the Biden administration's funding levels with a 1% across-the-board cut, limiting the deeper cuts some Republicans seek. Looking ahead, Mr. Edwards believed that discussions on the FY 2026 budget would likely begin in late April or early May, though meeting the September 30 deadline remained uncertain. Mr. Edwards also noted that President Trump had issued numerous executive orders in his first 30 days, impacting various federal agencies and policies. However, he stated that many of these orders have faced legal challenges, with some temporarily stayed and others awaiting court rulings, leading to uncertainty regarding their implementation.

Mr. Edwards also discussed efforts to scrutinize federal spending, noting that past administrations have conducted similar reviews, such as the Grace Commission under President Reagan and the Simpson-Bowles Commission under President Clinton. However, this time, he stated that the involvement of an outsider like Elon Musk has brought added attention to the issue. Mr. Edwards indicated that reports indicate that approximately $50 billion in federal spending over the past fiscal year was identified as waste, fraud, and abuse, with some estimates suggesting the figure could be significantly higher. Much of this scrutiny focuses on funds allocated under the Inflation Reduction Act, which may not have been used as intended. As new cabinet secretaries take office, they will assess their agencies' budgets and explore ways to streamline operations while maintaining effectiveness. However, he noted that proposals to cut spending drastically have faced pushback from agency heads. Ultimately, Congress will play a key role in determining budgetary changes through the appropriations process or standard legislation. Mr. Edwards indicated that since most legislation in the Senate required 60 votes to advance, bipartisan support would be necessary, making substantial budget reforms an uphill battle—except through the reconciliation process, which allowed for a

simple majority vote. Mr. Edwards concluded by offering to answer any questions, after which the floor was opened for discussion.

Council member Plaag inquired about the projected state deficit and whether it could lead to an increase in the state tax rate or significant budget cuts similar to those being considered in Washington. It was noted that the state income tax rate had been lowered to 4.25%, down from just under 5%. Mr. Edwards responded that while he could not predict the future with certainty, it was unlikely that the state Senate, particularly under Senator Berger's leadership, would support raising taxes. Instead, he indicated lawmakers may explore expanding the tax base through other means. He highlighted ongoing discussions about revenue triggers, which could slow down planned reductions in corporate and income taxes. Additionally, certain revenue-generating measures, such as video lottery terminals, have gained bipartisan interest and could play a role in addressing budget concerns.

The discussion also touched on potential revenue sources to address the state's projected deficit. Mr. Honaker noted that video lottery terminals (VLTs), already widespread in gas stations and other locations, remain unregulated. He added that a diverse coalition was forming around regulating and taxing VLTs, with some conservative lawmakers supporting regulation for control purposes, while others across the political spectrum had mixed opinions. Mr. Honaker indicated that VLTs could generate significant revenue if taxed, and Republican leadership may favor a high tax rate on them. Additionally, he stated that casinos remained a potential revenue driver, though they were unlikely to be part of this year's budget discussions, possibly emerging in future legislative sessions. Other strategies to address the deficit included expanding the tax base or relying on general revenue growth from increased business activity. Mr. Honaker indicated that this long-standing Republican strategy has worked in the past, though the current projected deficit presented new challenges.

The conversation then shifted to concerns about federal funding cuts affecting local agencies, mainly due to compliance issues with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies. In addition to these concerns, Council member Plaag indicated that some citizens have expressed concerns about data security, especially regarding the IRS and Social Security. He added that there was also growing unease about potential reductions in Medicaid funding and the impact these cuts could have on the local community. It was noted that the Town Council had previously discussed the possibility of passing a resolution to address these concerns, and the topic remained a point of consideration for future action.

Mr. Honaker noted that the administration had the authority to direct federal funding priorities, and agencies were enforcing compliance measures accordingly. However, he said that legal challenges may shape the future landscape of these policies.

Regarding the best way for the Town to engage with the community on these concerns, the lobbyists agreed that the Town Council may consider public forums, surveys, or town hall meetings to gather input from residents about how these issues were impacting their daily lives. They stated that it was also important to proceed cautiously, ensuring discussions remained non-partisan and focused on local impacts rather than broader political debates. Since these were federal-level policies, Mr. Edwards stated that municipal advocacy could involve drafting resolutions or letters to state and federal representatives, voicing the community's concerns, and requesting support or clarification on funding implications.

Ultimately, while municipalities had limited control over federal decisions, Mr. Edwards indicated that engaging residents and conveying their concerns to higher levels of government could be an effective strategy.

Mr. Edwards acknowledged that Medicaid was a critical issue in reconciliation discussions, and there was bipartisan concern over potential funding cuts. He added that securing enough votes in both the House and Senate to pass changes would be difficult, especially when considering the impact on constituents.

Regarding data security, Mr. Edwards stated that the ongoing threats from both foreign and domestic actors highlighted the need for modernization in federal systems. He noted that antiquated infrastructure left sensitive information vulnerable, as demonstrated by the high-profile IRS data leak to ProPublica. He believed that Congress would likely need to address these concerns to prevent further breaches.

As for federal funding for agencies and organizations, Mr. Edwards said compliance with administration policies was a determining factor, and entities unwilling to adjust to new funding requirements may face financial risks.

Mr. Honaker agreed that collecting data on community concerns and impacts was generally a good approach for municipalities to stay informed and advocate effectively. However, he cautioned that being overly proactive or taking a strong stance on certain issues could unintentionally create friction with state or federal officials working on related policies. He believed a balanced approach—gathering information while maintaining open lines of communication with elected representatives—would likely be the most effective way to address the community's needs without causing unintended political consequences.

Mr. Honaker indicated that the concern over Medicaid cuts was warranted and significant, especially given North Carolina's recent program expansion. He added that the potential for a reduced federal match could lead to widespread consequences, including losing coverage for hundreds of thousands of residents and severe financial strain on healthcare providers, particularly in rural areas.

Mr. Honaker stated that bipartisan worries in Raleigh reflected a broader awareness that these cuts could negatively impact constituents across political lines. Additionally, he noted that the mention of taxing nonprofit hospitals added another layer of complexity, as such a move could further strain the healthcare system, particularly for organizations that relied on their tax-exempt status to provide services to underserved communities.

Mr. Honaker believed that it was clear that maintaining open communication with federal representatives was crucial to ensuring that these concerns were fully understood before decisions were made that could have lasting consequences.

The discussion further emphasized the widespread concern over potential Medicaid cuts, particularly in North Carolina, where expansion had recently been implemented. Members highlighted the devastating impact such cuts could have on healthcare systems, especially in rural areas. Council member Tugman recalled her experience in hospital administration and stressed that reductions in funding, combined with the lingering effects of COVID-19 and the potential for future public health crises, could place an unsustainable burden on hospitals and healthcare providers.

Regarding the state's approach to Medicaid, it was noted that in the absence of federal action, the program would likely continue as implemented, though state officials remain anxious about potential changes. Communication between North Carolina's state representatives and federal lawmakers is ongoing, with many congressional delegates having prior experience in state government. These established relationships facilitate discussions on critical issues like Medicaid, though the extent of interstate communication with representatives from other states remains unclear. The conversation underscored the importance of continued advocacy and coordination to protect healthcare funding and access for North Carolina residents.

The meeting concluded with a discussion on past and ongoing interactions with federal representatives. It was noted that while some lawmakers, including Dr. Fox, have visited the town council in the past, there has not yet been an opportunity for the full council and staff to formally sit down with her. The council expressed interest in scheduling such a meeting to discuss key local concerns.

Brad Edwards highlighted the ongoing communication with congressional offices, particularly during emergencies such as hurricanes, to ensure that federal resources are directed toward infrastructure repairs and disaster recovery. He acknowledged the efforts of Senators Budd and Tillis in securing support for these initiatives.

The meeting concluded on an optimistic note regarding the Howard Street project. Mr. Honaker mentioned that John Cooper, as the former State Director for Rural Development in North Carolina, still maintained strong connections within the USDA, which has been instrumental in securing funding and support for the project. At this time, he did not believe there were any concerns regarding its progress, and officials remained optimistic about its

successful completion. Council members expressed appreciation for the ongoing efforts in Raleigh and Washington to advocate for the Town's priorities, reinforcing the importance of continued collaboration with state and federal representatives to ensure community projects and funding remain on track.

TENTATIVE AGENDA ADOPTION

Council member Tugman made a motion to approve the amended agenda. Mayor Pro-Tem George seconded the motion. Council member Plaag requested a friendly amendment to add a discussion of federal policy changes and a potential gathering of citizen input regarding the impact on the community as Council Matters Item Three. Both Tugman and George accepted the amendment and the motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No one was signed up to speak during public comment

REQUESTED APPEARANCES

REBECCA HUTCHINS/BOB OLBERG – DANIEL BOONE NATIVE GARDENS

Rebecca Hutchins and Bob Olberg, on behalf of Daniel Boone Native Gardens, presented a request for assistance in funding a deer fence. After speaking with Planning and Inspections staff, the group had already determined that a building permit was not required for the fence and was prepared to move forward with installation. They sought financial support from Council to cover the cost, which was estimated at just under $30,000.

Manager Davis mentioned that past tourism-related funds had supported similar projects, such as stage construction at the Gardens. However, it was noted that due to the approaching Howard Street project, other tourism-related funds had not been allocated in the previous budget and were not planned for the upcoming year.

Ms. Hutchins indicated that she had previously met with Mayor Futrelle and that he had led her to believe that the Gardens could at least be reimbursed for the cost of the fence, though she acknowledged she could have misunderstood. She believed that the Gardens would maintain the fence if approved. Council member Plaag asked if staff believed the Gardens would be eligible for Outside Agency Funding. Manager Davis answered they would be and suggested they apply when the application process opened in April. She further recommended against allocating funds for the deer fence due to an upcoming budget amendment for Howard Street engineering, which required an additional $220,000, significantly limiting available funding.

Council called for clarification from Public Works Director Todd Moody regarding the maintenance of the fence. He did not believe staff would be responsible for the maintenance of the fence if approved. He noted that they planned to spend the entire

$75,000 allocated by the General Assembly to construct the stage on the property and did not anticipate any left over for a fence.

Council member Tugman made a motion to allow Daniel Boone Gardens to erect a deer fence within planning guidelines with the caveat that Public Works staff will not be responsible for maintaining the fence. Mayor Pro-Tem George seconded the motion. Council member Plaag made a friendly amendment that the plan for the fence should be equal to what has been described at previous Council meetings and is in the video located here as of today's meeting. Both Council Member Tugman and Mayor Pro-Tem George accepted the amendment, and the motion passed.

VOTE: Aye: Tugman, George, Carter, Plaag
Nay: Roseman

WATAUGA COUNTY FARMER'S MARKET – MICHELLE DINEEN

Michelle Dineen, Market Director for the Watauga County Farmers Market, expressed gratitude for the Town's support and emphasized the market's role in Boone's economy and culture. She highlighted that the market, operating in Daniel Boone Park, drew over 2,000 visitors weekly at peak season, supported over 60 local farmers and artisans, and generated an estimated $1.49 million in vendor sales, with a broader economic impact likely closer to $3 million annually. She stressed the importance of maintaining a stable environment for vendors, many of whom rely on the market as their primary source of income. She raised concerns about site planning, vendor protections, and infrastructure issues that needed to be structured, as well as long-term solutions. Ms. Dineen recalled a recent situation with having to be relocated after Hurricane Helene.

Ms. Dineen called for a dedicated work session to address these challenges, particularly regarding debris containment, snow storage, and the repaving of the market's parking lot, which could disrupt operations. She requested a clear timeline for the upcoming repaving project and for the market to be involved in discussions about parking lot design and shared facility updates to ensure they met vendor and community needs. She also raised concerns about unauthorized vendor sales within Daniel Boone Park during market hours, which could create confusion and unfair competition for official market vendors. To address this, she requested clear policies and enforcement measures to uphold market integrity. Additionally, Ms. Dineen emphasized the need for stronger communication with the Town, proposing regular meetings with Town staff and stakeholders, as well as a formal notification system to keep the market informed of policy changes. She also underscored the importance of a stable license agreement with the Town that would integrate solutions to these concerns and ensure a long-term, mutually beneficial partnership.

Council members acknowledged the market's concerns and recognized the need for better coordination. Councilmember Tugman and Councilmember Carter admitted confusion regarding their supposed assigned roles in reviewing the market's license agreement, leading to a delay in discussions. They committed to improving communication and ensuring a more structured approach moving forward.

Discussion turned to the impact of the recent hurricane, which required the market's parking lot to be used for debris removal, displacing vendors. Manager Davis explained that alternative locations had been explored but denied by the state, leaving the Town with no choice but to use the current site. She apologized for communication lapses, citing that many staff members, including herself, had limited access to phones and email during the crisis. Ms. Dineen clarified that their concerns were not a critique of the Town's response but a request for better planning in case of future disruptions.

Additionally, discussions extended to unauthorized vendor activity outside of market oversight. Ms. Dineen explained that a vendor selling native plants with permission from the Daniel Boone Native Gardens had sparked concerns, as they were not subject to the same application process and regulations as official market vendors. While the market supported the gardens' fundraising efforts, they sought clarity on how independent vendors operating outside market rules might impact fair competition. Attorney Meade noted that this issue fell outside the market's license agreement, and Council members suggested further discussion at a future meeting.

Council member Plaag raised a concern regarding the application of the Farmers Market's vendor policies, particularly regarding a past interaction with the Appalachian Abortion Support Collective. He noted that the group had been informed in April of the previous year that they would be required to pay a $25 fee to table at the market, despite having tabled for free the year before. The justification given was that they were classified as a political advocacy organization. Council member Plaag pointed out that the group's stated mission was to provide information and support to individuals seeking abortion services in Western North Carolina and that abortion was legal in the state. Additionally, the market's communication had specified that the organization could distribute informational materials and stickers but could not give away free items such as pregnancy tests and Plan B, despite other vendors at the market being allowed to sell medicinal products.

Ms. Dineen acknowledged that there had been inconsistencies in applying their policies and took responsibility for the initial classification of the group as a non-profit community organization. However, after further review, Ms. Dineen indicated that the board determined that the organization fell into the market's fourth category, which included issue advocacy groups that required a participation fee. She clarified that while the group was still welcome to participate in the market, the board had chosen to enforce their policy, which included charging the fee.

Regarding the restriction on distributing medical supplies, Ms. Dineen explained that this rule applied to all non-profit groups. While organizations were allowed to distribute informational materials, she stated they could not sell or give away items at the market. Instead, they were encouraged to provide information on where such items could be obtained. Ms. Dineen emphasized that the board viewed the market as a space for outreach and education, and their policies were intended to reflect that purpose.

To finish the discussion, all parties, recognizing the need for better collaboration among all park-based organizations, Council proposed a work session for stakeholders, including the Farmers Market, Daniel Boone Native Gardens, and Horn in the West, to ensure coordinated planning. This meeting was scheduled for March 7th at 9:00 a.m. in the Town Council Chambers, with the first portion of the meeting focusing on discussions with staff regarding Town-wide planning considerations, followed by dedicated stakeholder discussions with each group. It was noted that each session was designed to be informational rather than a commitment-making meeting, allowing time for gathering input before final decisions were made.

To ensure fairness and efficiency, the Town Clerk was assigned to manage the agenda and to randomly assign the speaking order. Mayor Futrelle reassured stakeholders that the process would be transparent and inclusive, urging them to prepare their concerns, recommendations, and requests for discussion.

CONSENT AGENDA

Council member Roseman made a motion to approve the following items on the Consent Agenda:

1. Budget Amendments & Re-encumbrances

a. Fire Department

TO:Maintenance to Vehicles Car 21	010-500-350-525301	$3,705.59
Maintenance to Vehicles Tower 1	010-500-350-525301	$7,081.03
Physical Exams Workmen's Comp	010-500-350-509802	$120.00
FROM: Misc. Revenue Car 21	010-000-000-48900	($6,705.59)
Misc. Revenue Tower 1	010-000-000-489900	($7,081.03)
Misc. Revenue Workmen's Comp	010-000-000-489900	($120.00)

1. Funds are to repair Car 21 when it was hit shielding an accident scene.
2. Funds are to repair Tower 1 compartment door damage.
3. Funds are for workmen's compensation claim.

2. Contract Amendment – SDR

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Council member Carter seconded the motion.

Council member Plaag expressed frustration with the quality of work by contractor SDR. Manager Davis agreed that she was not pleased with their level of service and would be hesitant to reengage with this firm in the future, should the need arise. Public Works Director Moody also agreed, but that the Town was stuck with them for the time being.

This motion carried unanimously.

Mayor Futrelle declared a break at 7:50 p.m. Council reconvened at 8:02 p.m.

PLANNING MATTERS

CONSIDERATION OF ANNEXATION PETITION – ESTEP/RIVERS

Deputy Director Wise presented the annexation request and noted the application requested a R1 zoning designation. He also noted an error on the Resolution – the date of the Public Hearing should be April 23, 2025, at 6 p.m. Council member Plaag noted that he was friends with both applicants and had worked with them, though he did not believe it impacted his ability to be impartial in a vote. Mayor Pro-Tem George made a motion to approve the Resolution, Setting the Date of Public Hearing as April 23, 2025, at 6 p.m. in the Council Chambers. Council member Roseman seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

CONSIDERATION OF CASE HEARD AT JANUARY 27, 2025 PUBLIC HEARING

Case A24-0081 ASU – General Use Zoning Map Amendment

Mayor Pro-Tem George expressed frustration with the initial media coverage of a recent issue involving this university-owned property. He welcomed a new reporter from the Watauga Democrat and acknowledged the previous reporter's work but voiced disappointment in how the situation was initially framed. He noted that the first report suggested that the Town was simply moving forward with additional student housing without providing the broader context of the property's history.

Mayor Pro-Tem George member emphasized that the property in question was the former high school site, which has been owned by the university for over a decade. He felt that the article failed to communicate this and other key background information, leading to misconceptions among the public and generating unwarranted opposition toward the university. He expressed concern that the way the story was presented fueled a perception of a land grab by the university rather than reflecting the reality of long-term planning and ownership. He further stated that the coverage appeared to be designed to provoke opposition and anger rather than providing a comprehensive and balanced account of the situation.

Mayor Pro-Tem George then made a motion, which was seconded by Council member Carter, that the proposed amendment to the Town's zoning map is consistent with the Town's comprehensive plan and any other adopted plans of the Town that are applicable because the amendment because the amendment is consistent with: Comprehensive Plan Policy 2.1.1 Economic Development D. Economic development efforts shall encourage the revitalization and reuse of currently unused or underutilized structures, sites and infrastructure in appropriately located areas. Comprehensive Plan Policy 2.3 The Community D. Coordinated, inter-governmental and university-town planning for urban area land use and development, transportation, utilities, recycling, environmental management, law enforcement, education, recreation, tourism and economic development shall be encouraged.

VOTE:	Aye:	George, Carter, Tugman, Plaag
	Nay:	None
	Abstain:	Roseman

Attorney Meade reminded Council member Roseman of her duty as a Council person to vote.

Mayor Pro-Tem George made a second motion to approve Ordinance A24-0081, and that approval is reasonable and in the public interest because it will allow the university to utilize the property they have long owned to house more students, alleviate the housing market, help with rental rates, and develop ongoing state-owned properties that are not on the tax roll. Council member Plaag suggested a friendly amendment to include the Planning Commission's recommendation: "This is a partial piece of land that has not been in use for a period of time, and it would be very beneficial to the whole community to put the property to use." Mayor Pro-Tem George accepted this amendment. Council member Plaag then seconded the motion.

VOTE:	Aye:	George, Carter, Tugman, Plaag
	Nay:	None
	Abstain:	Roseman

<u>Case A25-0108 UDO Text Amendment – General Use Zoning Map Amendment</u>

Council member Tugman made a motion that the proposed amendment to the Town's zoning ordinance is consistent with the Town's comprehensive plan and any other adopted plans of the Town that are applicable because of: A. The protection and rehabilitation of viable neighborhoods shall be encouraged to ensure their continued existence as a major housing source and as a reflection of the area's image as an attractive, highly livable community. F. The affordable housing needs of area residents, particularly elderly and low

to moderate-income residents, shall be recognized in Town policies and actions regarding residential development. Council member Roseman seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Council member Tugman made a second motion to approve Ordinance A25-0108, and that approval is reasonable and in the public interest because it facilitates affordable housing in an emergency situation and gets the community back up and running to its prior state. Council member Plaag seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

REQUEST FOR DISCUSSION AND POTENTIAL ACTION REGARDING LOCAL HOUSING BILL

Manager Davis noted that Doug Matheson, a Council member from Blowing Rock, had initially approached Mayor Futrelle to gauge interest in participating. Since then, she indicated discussions had taken place with Blowing Rock Manager Shane Fox, who indicated an interest in pursuing workforce housing and offered the Town an opportunity to sign onto the proposal.

Council members reviewed the proposal's language, noting concerns about its wording, which currently grouped the Town of Boone, the Town of Blowing Rock, and the Watauga County Board of Education as a collective entity. Attorney Meade suggested that the language be revised to reflect that Boone's participation could be independent rather than requiring all three entities to act jointly. Members agreed that it would not be practical for Boone to enter a joint venture with Blowing Rock, as the two towns did not share jurisdictional land.

Manager Davis confirmed that the proposal that Representative Pickett had sponsored the proposal at the state level. Council members expressed overall support for the initiative, emphasizing that affordable workforce housing was a priority. Council member Carter voiced strong support, stating he would not oppose an initiative aimed at providing affordable housing for local employees. He also agreed with the need to modify the language for clarity.

He then made a motion to move forward with participation, with the understanding that the language of the proposal would be adjusted to reflect independent participation by the Town of Boone. Council member Plaag seconded the motion before the floor was opened to comments.

Issues were raised regarding whether this initiative was an extension of previous discussions held last year concerning the Watauga County Board of Education and its foundation exploring housing solutions. Council member Tugman noted that the Board of Education and its foundation had shown interest in applying for specific grant funding, but it was unclear whether this proposal was connected to those efforts. Mayor Futrelle confirmed that there had been no direct discussions with the Board of Education or its

foundation regarding this proposal and that the current discussions had only involved Blowing Rock Manager Shane Fox.

With no further discussion, Council proceeded to a vote, and the motion to move forward with participation passed unanimously.

REQUEST FOR DISCUSSION AND POTENTIAL ACTION REGARDING WAYS TO BETTER UTILIZE EVENING TOWN COUNCIL MEETINGS

Mayor Pro-Tem George made a motion to table this discussion. Council member Carter seconded the motion and suggested discussing the item during the next work session in March. The motion carried unanimously.

DISCUSSION REGARDING FEDERAL POLICY CHANGES

Council revisited discussions from the February 12, 2025, meeting regarding recent policy changes, federal grant restrictions, their impact on local agencies, and broader concerns about data security. It was noted that Council had previously tasked two members, Council members Roseman and Plaag, with drafting a resolution on these issues.

After completing a draft resolution, the members reconsidered the approach, determining that gathering direct input from the community would be more beneficial than making assumptions based on their own observations. To facilitate this, Council member Plaag suggested hosting a town hall event where residents could voice concerns about how federal actions affected local agencies and the community. He stated the purpose of this event would be to allow Council to represent the concerns of their constituents better and, when appropriate, convey those concerns to state and federal representatives.

Members discussed the importance of inviting key federal representatives to the town hall event. Dr. Virginia Foxx, the district's U.S. House Representative, was suggested as a primary guest, given her role in federal decision-making. It was also suggested that Senators Tillis and Budd be invited to ensure broader representation and increase the likelihood of federal officials hearing directly from the community. Members agreed that having as many representatives as possible in attendance would be beneficial.

Council member Plaag expressed deep concern about the uncertainty surrounding federal policies and their impacts on local governance. He described the situation as chaotic and unpredictable, likening it to a bull in a china shop, where every step taken risked further disruption and unintended consequences.

Members agreed to move forward with planning the town hall event, emphasizing the need for broad community participation and engagement to ensure that local voices were heard at both the state and federal levels.

Council member Roseman emphasized her dislike for political bullying and the uncertainty caused by current federal policies. However, Attorney Meade cautioned that while it was

important to voice concerns, the Town should avoid language that could inadvertently make it a target for political or financial repercussions. She stressed the importance of protecting the Town's financial interests, particularly given the millions of dollars in federal funding at stake. She urged Council to approach discussions with careful language to ensure that advocating for constituents did not put the town at unnecessary risk.

Council member Carter acknowledged these concerns, stating that he understood the anxiety surrounding the situation but emphasized the need for careful, measured responses. Mayor Pro-Tem George also supported moving forward with the town hall, referencing earlier discussions with lobbyists and reaffirming that local governments play a crucial role in amplifying the voices of their constituents effectively and appropriately.

The discussion concluded with a general agreement to proceed with planning the town hall event, ensuring that key federal representatives were invited and that the discussion remained constructive and beneficial to the Town and its residents.

The council discussed potential dates and venues for the proposed town hall event. It was noted that Representative Foxx's congressional district days—when she was expected to meet with constituents—could be an optimal time for the event. March 13 was identified as the next available non-Friday district day, but Town staff confirmed that the Council Chambers would not be available on that date. Council agreed on the importance of choosing a date aligned with congressional availability to increase the likelihood of securing federal representatives' attendance but also emphasized the urgency of gathering community input sooner rather than later.

Aconsensus emerged around the need for an evening meeting, as it was believed this would maximize public participation. Council member Tugman raised concerns that if the event were well-publicized and widely attended, the current Council Chambers would not be able to accommodate the expected crowd. She suggested utilizing the Watauga County Courthouse's main courtroom, which was noted for its capacity and formal setting. Members agreed that using a larger, neutral space could help facilitate a more productive and well-organized discussion.

It was suggested that staff research upcoming district days and propose two or three viable options rather than relying solely on a single date. While the week of Easter break in March was identified as a congressional recess, it was acknowledged that representatives might have personal or travel commitments during that time, making it an uncertain option for scheduling.

FURTHER DISCUSSION OF POSSIBLE LOCAL ACT RELATING TO SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT FEES

Attorney Meade presented an item for discussion regarding the development of a local act to allow small businesses and startups to pay system development fees in installments.

She indicated that a draft act was shared with Lobbyist Nathan Honaker and structured to capture small business efforts while excluding minimal-use cases where installment plans would be impractical. The proposed range was 2,500 to 3,250 gallons per day, equating to fees between $5,000 and $30,000.

Attorney Meade indicated that the draft act proposed allowing installment payments for up to three years with interest charges, subject to local government discretion. She stated that Representative Pickett and local business owner Seth Norris responded positively to the proposal, which was later escalated to consideration as a statewide act instead of a local one.

Council members expressed optimism about the initiative, with Council member Carter emphasizing the positive impact on small businesses statewide. He acknowledged the board's commitment to finding a solution to startup costs and noted that the Chamber of Commerce had responded favorably.

Concerns were raised about the act's potential transformation at the state level, as different municipalities may have different standards for measuring water usage. Council members remained hopeful but acknowledged the need to monitor legislative developments closely and to potentially have representatives from the town present when the bill was open for public comment at the General Assembly.

DISCUSSION AND POTENTIAL ACTION REGARDING WYN PROPERTY

Manager Davis updated Council on inquiries regarding the use of the WYN Property for a temporary childcare facility. She confirmed that a few Council members had asked about reaching out to Appalachian State University (ASU) regarding its potential interest in utilizing the property for childcare expansion.

Council members discussed potential costs associated with bringing the facility up to code. Manager Davis noted that while the Town would not assume the full cost of renovations, some expenses—such as improving driveway access—might need to be considered. Council agreed to first gauge ASU's interest before making financial commitments.

Council member Plaag suggested considering the WYN Property for future employee housing projects. Combined with the adjacent water tower property, he believed it could be an ideal site for workforce housing initiatives.

CLOSED SESSION

Upon a motion by Mayor Pro-Tem George, seconded by Council member Plaag, Council voted unanimously to enter into closed session at 8:45 p.m. pursuant to:

1.N.C. Gen. Stat.§ 143-318.11(a)(1), to review, approve and seal closed session minutes from Council's prior closed session(s).

2.N.C. Gen. Stat.§ 143-318.11(a)(3), to consult with the Town Attorney in order to preserve the attorney-client privilege between the attorney and the Town Council and obtain legal advice, consider and/or give instructions to the attorney concerning one or more potential legal claims.

Upon a motion by Council member Plaag, seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem George, Council voted unanimously to exit closed session at 9:29 p.m.

Mayor Futrelle adjourned the meeting at approximately 9:30 p.m.