BLACK MOUNTAIN TOWN COUNCIL MINUTES

May 20, 2026 | Budget Work Session | Time: 5:00 PM

Town Hall Council Chambers | 160 Midland Avenue, Black Mountain, NC 28711

Black Mountain Town Council held a budget work session on Wednesday, May 20, 2026, at 5:00 PM in the Council Chambers of Town Hall, 160 Midland Avenue, Black Mountain, NC 28711.

1. CALL TO ORDER.

Mayor C. Michael Sobol called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. with the following members in attendance: Vice Mayor Archie Pertiller, Town Council Member Alice Berry, Council Member Larry Harris, Town Council Member Doug Hay, Town Council Member Ryan Stone.

The following staff members were present: Richard Hicks, Interim Town Manager; Scott Buffkin, Interim Assistant Town Manager; Wesley Barker, Town Clerk; Steve Parker, Police Chief; John Coffey, Fire Chief; Jamey Matthews, Public Works Director; Jacob Guiot, Recreation & Parks Director; Jennifer Tipton, Senior Admin Planning Department; Matt Begley, Budget Analyst; Chad Goins, Interim Project Manager; Laurel Mabery, Accountant; Greta Gibson, Revenue & Customer Service Supervisor.

Mayor Sobol asked for an update on the golf course watering and the water levels at Lake Tomahawk. The lake levels had previously been lowered to allow for an Eagle Scout project to begin the building of an accessible fishing pier (project was approved by the Council on October 13, 2025), and as a result, the lowered water levels prevented the irrigation systems from working properly to water the golf course greens, which was affecting their health, also due in part to the drought and lack of rainfall. Interim Town Manager Richard Hicks stated a tanker truck had been used by Golf Course staff to water the greens at night to prevent the grass from dying. Long-term solutions to fix the irrigation pump at the lake were also discussed, as currently the lake levels must be so high for the pumps to work properly. Some other discussion ensued with this topic. No formal Council actions taken.

2. FY26-27 BUDGET WORK SESSION.

2.A. Draft FY26-27 Budget.

Interim Town Manager Richard Hicks reviewed the draft FY 2026-27 proposed budget and reported significant projected shortfalls of $1,858,260 in the General Fund and $918,479 in

the Water Fund. He stated Council guidance would be needed regarding potential cuts, deferrals, and any acceptable tax increase needed to balance the budget.

Mr. Hicks noted the budget process is complicated by Buncombe County's tax revaluation and pending State legislation that could delay revaluations for one year. He reported current property tax revenues of approximately $5.4 million, vehicle tax revenues of $315,000, and a current tax rate of 32.1 cents per $100 valuation. He stated municipalities may need to consider budget scenarios based on different valuation outcomes and that statutes require publication of a revenue-neutral tax rate, with the option to also publish a rate including growth.

Mr. Hicks explained that one penny on the tax rate would generate approximately $263,000 under the new values and approximately $184,616 under the old values. Using the old values, he stated a 9.75-cent tax increase would be needed to balance the proposed budget with no other changes. Sales tax, golf course fees, stormwater fees, and the appropriate funds used for employee costs were discussed.

Mr. Hicks also noted $561,000 was budgeted from Fund Balance in the current budget and cautioned against relying on that amount to balance future budgets, as the LGC recommends at least 8% and the Town's Fund Balance is projected to be approximately 12% at the end of the fiscal year.
Personnel costs were reviewed, with salaries totaling 33% of the budget and fringe benefits adding another 18%, for a combined 51% of the total budget. No employee cost-of-living increases were included at this time. Health insurance through the State Health Plan is estimated to increase by 10%, retirement contribution rates have increased, and other utility costs were discussed, including fuel, energy, and a 30% increase in wholesale water rates from the City of Asheville, which was expected and communicated after the 30% increase from last year, which would also occur this FY. Increasing customer water rates was also discussed due to the Water Fund shortfall and the wholesale water cost increases.

The Fire Department (BMFD) budget was reviewed, including concerns that BMFD is the lowest-paid department in the county and may lose employees as other departments have higher starting salaries at $60,000, compared to $48,000 with BMFD. The Planning and Development Fund and Stormwater Funds were reviewed, including current stormwater fees and related project revenue. Mr. Hicks summarized that the proposed budget presented did not include tax increases, water fee increases, or similar revenue adjustments, and that Council would need to determine whether to pursue cuts, staffing changes, fee increases, or other options. Contributions to non-profits and community organizations totaled $48,000.

Mr. Hicks then reviewed proposed Administration, Finance, Human Resources, and IT budget line items. A discussion of charging a fee for EV chargers took place, as the Town currently does not charge for the service. Some EV chargers are funded through a State of North Carolina grant ending in late 2026, after which fees could be considered to generate revenue to offset electric costs. Significant IT expenses include cybersecurity, software, internet, and the support/IT management contract with Advanced Data & Network Solutions.

3. ADJOURNMENT.

The next budget meeting was scheduled for May 21 at 8:30 a.m. With no further business to be discussed, Mayor C. Michael Sobol adjourned the meeting at 10:00 a.m.

_____
C. Michael Sobol, Mayor

_____
Wesley M. Barker, Town Clerk