BLACK MOUNTAIN TOWN COUNCIL MINUTES

June 15, 2026 | FY26-27 Budget Public Hearing | Time: 6:00 PM

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

Black Mountain Town Council held a Fiscal Year 2026-27 Budget Public Hearing meeting on Monday, June 15, 2026, at 6:00 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 6:00 p.m. with the following Council 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: Interim Town Manager Richard Hicks; Interim Assistant Town Manager Scott Buffkin; Police Chief Steve Parker; Fire Chief John Coffey; Public Works Director Jamey Matthews; Recreation & Parks Director Jacob Guiot, Customer Service & Revenue Supervisor Greta Gibson; Budget Analyst Matt Begley; Senior Admin Jennifer Tipton.

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2. PUBLIC HEARING FY26-27 BUDGET.

Interim Assistant Town Manager Scott Buffkin presented the FY26-27 proposed budget. ***A copy of this presentation is included at the end of these minutes.***

Council Member Larry Harris had Scott Buffkin confirm that the Town has no choice in the rate increases for health insurance and retirement. Scott mentioned that it would be very hard to extricate the Town from the State Health Care Plan and said that is not an option at this time. Scott stated the new rate of retirement is 22% and the estimate for insurance increases is 10%, but we won't know for sure until November. Mayor Sobol sked for a list of the exact numbers.

Council Member Doug Hay explained to the audience that the tax rate increase is based on the old valuation numbers on the probability that the Governor will sign SB 889. This is the most conservative if the bill is signed. If the bill is vetoed and not overridden, the rates will have to change, but the revenue will stay the same.

The loan for the lead & copper requirement is a loan that has to be paid back. It will only cover about 1/3 of the water customers for identifying their line material.

Asheville is increasing their water rates by 32%. The Town currently receives about 60% of our water from Asheville. Council Member Harris noted that when the numbers were compared of

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buying from Asheville, versus adding more wells, the difference was only about $60,000. Mayor Sobol said that we have 8 wells that produce water and we have 2 additional wells that were closed in 2023, that could be reopened and increase our production by 20%.

Council Member Alice Berry made the motion to open the public hearing for the FY26-27 Budget. A vote of 5-0 in favor.

Tony Sola – 21 Fates Overlook Loop – asked for no cuts to BMFD or BMPD as they are essential services and need to have competitive pay – offered to create a volunteer committee of citizens who have experience that could help come up with a solution for a permanent home for BMFD and BMPD – suggested raising sanitation rates, golf rates, and water rates to cover 100% - thinks raising the base rate for water is unfair and should increase the usage rate more – recognized need to tax rate increase.

Glen Rechtine – 190 Settings Blvd – said he has had 10 years of experience with BMPD and BMFD (time he has lived here) and that they are highly skilled – said to keep level of service – mentioned that morale was low because BMFD and BMPD are homeless, working overtime that they are not getting paid for, and earning comp time but can't take any time off – agrees that sanitation, water, and golf should be charged to cover 100% - likes the idea of a volunteer committee.

Leanne Cunningham – 250 Vance Avenue – said 1 need is BMFD salaries – it will be difficult to keep ours if we don't pay at least what the County pays – will lose good, well-trained professionals and it will be harder to retain – mentioned that we can't rely on the Forest Service if we have a wildfire because they have been cut severely – asked if we can lobby the State for help.

Don Collins – 80 Camp Branch Road – said that he and others were promised free garbage pickup when they were annexed into the town – mentioned his time on the board and as mayor and that they lowered dept and at one point had a $7.5 million cushion – said other boards have run the Town into debt – said we need to make up the fees from somewhere else other than garbage – mentioned that we were once the laughingstock and that SOG used videos of our council meetings to show others how not to behave and how not to run a meeting – mentioned that during his time on the board, they voted to suspend their pay to help pay for a position that was needed – said the garbage fee is not right and that we are getting enough taxes from having annexed them – mentioned that Raleigh put an end to involuntary annexation – said he and a previous board had eliminated the garbage tax – asked to respect previous boards of offering free garbage pickup.

Kathy Phillips – 26 Hi View Drive – said that if the council has to choose with community group to fund, she recommends Swannanoa Valley Christian Ministry since they offer help to the entire community – rescinded the tree committee's request for $4,000 and said that they could find money elsewhere.

Angela Levine – 172 Settings Blvd – told a story about her mom falling and getting great care from emergency services – said that our community will not get speedy care if BMFD and BMPD are not funded – asked that there be no cuts and that the Council approve the raises – asked that a hiring freeze not be implemented and that the Town look at a 5% vacancy rate instead – said that sanitation, water, and golf should be funded by the people who use them and should be self-

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sustaining – supported establishing a citizen committee to look for ideas for a permanent house for BMPD and BMFD.

Vice Mayor Archie Pertiller made a motion to close the public hearing. A vote of 5-0 in favor.

Interim Town Manager Richard Hicks stated that the increase in the golf course fees will cover 100% of operations and should also allow for a small profit.

Richard said that BMPD had discussed a vacancy rate but preferred to freeze the position. Richard said that BMFD is fully staffed at this time, but with the jump in competitive salaries, we will have to keep that up with the increases from other communities.

Council Member Haris mentioned that staff will have 30 days to find additional cuts that total $100,000.

Mayor Sobol stated that over the last ten years the population has grown 12%, employees have increased 50% and the budget has increased 100%.

Council Member Harris noted that in years past the Town didn't have a sanitation department and that it required additional employees, and that there were other positions to BMFD and BMPD. Mr. Harris also noted that grant funds are included in the budget and that is some of the increase as well. He also said that there are more recovery funds to receive over the next 3-5 years and that funds that are currently in the Helene fund will go back to the general fund.

Further, Mr. Harris said that the general fund has not changed much because there are still the taxes, utilities, etc., so it will look very similar. He noted that the grant funds are only for certain projects and that there has been an increase in growth and sales tax. He also said this budget is following on the heels of a tough year and we can't use Fund Balance to operate.

Council Member Hay noted that the increases are also from deferred maintenance to buildings and equipment and the Town is having to play catchup. Mayor Sobol noted that future boards will have to find ways to increase revenue.

Council Member Harris spoke about sanitation tipping fees and that we have no choice on that cost. It is based on tonnage and currently is about $250,000 and goes up $50,000 to $100,000 each year. Mr. Harris also noted that Givens Highland Farms does not pay property taxes but does pay fees. The Council asked for clarity on what fees Givens Highland Farms pays and asked that they have that before June 30th.

The Council asked for clarity on why BMPD preferred freezing a position.

Mayor Sobol said that just because the budget and departments are questioned does not mean that there is non-support for that department.

Council Member Harris briefly spoke about unfunded mandates that come from the Federal level and the State.

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3. CLOSED SESSION- N.C.G.S. 143-318.11 (A)(6).

The Town Council would now enter into closed session pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11 (a)(3): To consult with an attorney employed or retained by the public body in order to preserve the attorney-client privilege between the attorney and the public body, which privilege is hereby acknowledged, which privilege is hereby acknowledged; and NCGS 143-318.11 (a)(6) To consider the qualifications, competence, performance, character, fitness, conditions of appointment, or conditions of initial employment of an individual public officer or employee or prospective public officer or employee; or to hear or investigate a complaint, charge, or grievance by or against an individual public officer or employee.

Town Council Member Ryan Stone made a motion to enter Closed Session pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11(a)(6). A vote of 5-0 in favor.

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4. ADJOURNMENT. The Council returned from Closed Session at 7:14 p.m. With no further business to be discussed, Mayor C. Michael Sobol adjourned the meeting.

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C. Michael Sobol, Mayor

Attest: _____
Wesley M. Barker, Town Clerk

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