



## Town of Waynesville, NC

### Town Council Special Called Meeting-Budget Workshop Cont

Municipal Building, 16 South Main Street, Waynesville, NC 28786

Date: May 14th, 2024 Time: 5:00 p.m.

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(828) 452-2491 [cpoolton@waynesvillenc.gov](mailto:cpoolton@waynesvillenc.gov)

#### **A. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Gary Caldwell called the meeting to order at 4:10 pm with the following members present:

Mayor Gary Caldwell

Mayor Pro Tempore Chuck Dickson

Councilmember Jon Feichter

Councilmember Anthony Sutton

Councilmember Julia Freeman

The following staff members were present:

Rob Hites, Town Manager

Jesse Fowler, Assistant Town Manager

Candace Poolton, Town Clerk

Town Attorney Martha Bradley

Elizabeth Teague, Director of Development Services

Taylor Garland, Assistant Finance Director

Assistant Police Chief, Brandon Gilmore

Ricky Foster, Assistant Public Services Director

Page McCurry, Human Resources Director

Luke Kinsland, Recreation Director

Beth Gilmore, DWC Director

Members of the Media:

Paul Nielsen, The Mountaineer

#### **B. DISCUSSION BY COUNCILMEMBERS**

Mayor Caldwell said a 3.8 cent tax rate increase would give the Fire Department two firefighters and the Police Department \$49,000 starting salaries for officers. Councilmember Dickson asked what the starting salaries were for firefighters. Ms. McCurry said \$39,000. He asked what the consequences would be for the other employees if police salaries were increased. Mr. Hites said other employees would receive a 2.5% COLA and 2.5% career track. Councilmember Dickson mentioned that the overtime pay in this budget showed \$10,000 for the fire

department, and police with \$175,000, and he asked why it was so high. Mr. Hites explained that police department has been understaffed, so they've been having to cover a lot of shifts and the inability to recruit creates more overtime pay. Councilmember Dickson asked if the town is charging people to utilize staff for special events. Mr. Hites said they don't charge because special events bring commerce to the town and it's an incentive to use the town's police for free, but Council can charge if they wish. He said it costs \$3800 for a special event that requires staff (police, fire, trash, etc.).

Councilmember Freeman asked why the new proposed budget showed a reduction in cardio equipment. Mr. Hites said not all the machines need to be replaced at once, and he tried to make sure each department got something while keeping the tax rate increase at a minimum.

Councilmember Feichter asked Chief Webb on his thoughts about hiring two firefighters now, but not hiring two more later in January as previously discussed. Chief Webb said that still leaves two shifts vacant. Councilmember Feichter said he is comfortable raising taxes to provide two firefighters now, two later, and provide a \$49,000 salary for starting police officers. He mentioned that every time they lose a police officer, that costs the town \$63,000. He added that the town worked hard to get fully staffed, and now they're falling behind again. Councilmember Feichter said that no matter what Council decides in setting the tax rate, he would like to be more proactive in helping low-income folks in the community to make sure they know if they are in one of the tax-exempt programs.

Councilmember Sutton said raising taxes helps to keep small town values and provide a safe community for residents. He said if taxes are not raised, then there must be exponential growth to afford the services that residents want. Councilmember Sutton said he would raise taxes to whatever is needed to provide employees and citizens what they need. Councilmember Dickson said he does not want to raise taxes. Councilmember Freeman said the highest she could go is 2.5 cents. Mayor Caldwell said he proposed a 3.8 cent tax rate increase. Councilmember Dickson said a 4 cent tax raise increase would be \$100 a year on a \$245,000 home. Mr. Hites estimated that a 4.6 cent tax increase would pay for two more firefighters later as well as the police salary increase and two firefighters now.

## **C. SCHEDULE OF FURTHER BUDGET SESSIONS/BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING**

Mr. Hites reminded Council that the Budget Public Hearing will be rescheduled to June 11<sup>th</sup> at tonight's Council meeting to allow more time to discuss the budget.

***A motion was made by Councilmember Dickson, seconded by Councilmember Sutton, to adjourn the meeting at 4:56pm. The motion passed unanimously.***

ATTEST:

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Gary Caldwell, Mayor

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Robert W. Hites, Jr. Town Manager

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Candace Poolton, Town Clerk