

Town Council Meeting - Tuesday, May 9th, 2023

The Town of Blowing Rock Town Council met for their regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, March 14, at 6:00 p.m. The meeting took place at Town Hall located at 1036 Main Street Blowing Rock, NC. Present were Mayor Charlie Sellers, Mayor Pro-Tem Doug Matheson and Council Members Albert Yount, David Harwood, Melissa Pickett, and Pete Gherini. Others in attendance were Town Manager Shane Fox, Town Attorney Allen Moseley, Town Engineer Doug Chapman, Police Chief Aaron Miller, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, Emergency Services Director Kent Graham, Finance Officer Nicole Norman, IT Director Thomas Steele, Public Works Director Matt Blackburn, and Town Clerk Hilari Hubner were unable to attend.

Mon, May 15, 2023, 3:54PM • 3:01:06

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

project, town, underground utilities, paid, main street, years, phase, council, put, blowing, people, parking, Shane, cost, rock, move, tonight, vote, talk, residents.

SPEAKERS

Kevin Rothrock, Melissa Pickett, Aaron Miller, Mike Quinto, Hilari Hubner, Brian Summers, Aidan Waite, Hunt Shuford, Shane Fox, Pete Gherini, Richard Gambill, Doug Matheson, Bill Hall, Allen Moseley, Cobb Milner, Albert Yount, All, Charlie Sellers, William Brinker, Jenny Miller, Ben Powell, Erica Brinker, Nicole Norman, Doug Chapman, David Harwood, Sue Sweeting, Kristen Brown, Tom Barrett, John Grafe

Charlie Sellers

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to our May 9th Town Council meeting. Roll call for attendance. All were present. Approval of the minutes from the April 11, 2023, regular and closed session meeting minutes.

Pete Gherini

Motion to approve.

Doug Matheson

Second.

All

Unanimously approved.

Charlie Sellers

Regular agenda adoption. Motion to approve?

Doug Matheson

Motion to approve.

Melissa Pickett

Second.

All

Unanimously approved.

Charlie Sellers

Consent Agenda; Budget Amendment #2023-09, Tax Release #2022-09, #2022-04 and Mayview Madness Race Approval. Do I have a motion to approve?

David Harwood

Motion to approve.

Melissa Pickett

Second.

All

Unanimously approved.

Charlie Sellers

Public comment section, this will be limited to 3 minutes. If you are with a group of people and you all have the same thought or idea. It's probably best not to replicate that. Have that individual say that you are speaking for Joe, Don, David, Virginia or whoever. That's our request and we do want everybody to be heard. But if we can refrain from duplicating comments, that would be really great. Okay, so we can get this meeting, moving along and get to the issues at hand. So that being said, do we have everybody signed up that wants to speak? Great, first on the list, Charlie Sellers. It's a little unusual Council, excuse me, I'm gonna step down here.

Doug Matheson

State your name and address.

Charlie Sellers

Give me three minutes. My name is Charlie Sellers. I live at 137 Hill Top Way. Ladies and gentlemen, this whole issue on underground utilities has taken an unfortunate turn. That turn is it has split our town. I'm not in favor of that, if these groups and others that have been for and against had taken all their time and money, put in towards underground utilities, we wouldn't even be here, it'd be paid for.

So that being said I'm asking the citizens and the groups when tonight's over mend ways if you sent out a letter or email that was controversial apologize. I will and I'm asking you as the Mayor. Some things that came up and I want to set straight for the record. The Town does not have a water/sewer crumbling issue. Sunset Dr, Sourwood, Green Hill Rd, Heather Ridge, Main Street and Main Street to come have been replaced. You can't combine water and sewer money with general fund money, they have to operate separately. The Town does not have a debt problem, keep that in mind. These are some of the email's guys and gals. One note from a citizen stated the property taxes would go up three cents or possibly more. And they were quoting a former Council person. That is incorrect because the Council has not received the proposed budget, we don't know how much it is going up. But I will tell you this, going from experience it's not going up three cents. Okay, that information cannot come out until the Council sees the budget and we've not seen it. You know there were comments made about seasonal people and so on, seasonal people pay taxes just like I do they have the right to their opinion and their thoughts. There was one comment made about we should have fired Shane Fox when he resigned as done in all big corporations. Bull. I worked for big corporations, and we didn't do that all the time unless the person was delinquent, didn't do their job and we put them on their way. That's incorrect. We kept Shane because we knew Shane could take us to a different level, even with one month to go. It was mentioned that this individual in town led the Town meeting on utilities that is incorrect. Notice I am not mentioning any names because I don't have to, we're a small town. There is no collaboration between the Chamber and the Town of Blowing Rock. We all work together with a common goal, what is best for our Town. I don't want to hear any more ugly behavior. Have I hit three minutes?

Doug Matheson

Yes.

Charlie Sellers

Okay, I have to follow my rules too. I'm asking, let's get back to one Blowing Rock ok. If we'd sold tickets tonight for this meeting, we could have paid for underground utilities. Thank you. Ok, Aidan Waite would you come up and state your name and address please.

Aidan Waite

My name is Aiden Waite. I live at 144 Chestnut Dr. We're the rock house right behind the St. Mary's Church. We have lived here a couple of years, we are residents, voters, and I just have got a couple of things to say. So, I'm going to ramble just a little bit. My name is Aiden Waite, and I'm a full-time resident. Since I became a citizen of the US, I have voted in every election that I can; local, state, and federal. In 2004, we bought a condo here in Blowing Rock. I fell in love with it. It's close to a village in England, my wife Lisa, which some of you know, is actually from Greensboro. And she's been coming here since she was a child. She loves Tweetsie Railroad even still. We bought the house in 2014, with the idea of retiring, and like everybody else COVID sort of moved us up here a little bit quicker than we had planned. So anyway, the reason why I'm talking, Mr. Mayor and the Town Council, is I walk around and talk to people, and I'm amazed at some of the things I hear. I know sometimes we're all in our own world. And we do not see the bigger picture. We know Blowing Rock can't stay as is and will never be what it was many years ago. But some of the things I hear will not enhance or move Blowing Rock forward in a positive way. The Main Street water and sewer project is wonderful and that's been

approved and thankfully paid for. Underground utilities are a necessity. We haven't had bad weather in three or four years. But we all know when the bad weather comes, down come the electric wires and everything else. So even though Blue Ridge Electric is very responsive, it's very hard to cover the county of Watauga if everything suddenly comes down at the same time. My question with where this is concerned, last week, I know they got kicked down the road a little bit. But understanding if it was done at the same time as the sewage and water the state, I believe, will pay for the paving. If we decide four or five years down the road to do the underground cables, what kind of cost would it be for us then because we would have to pay. Am I right in believing that the state wouldn't still jump in and pay.

Charlie Sellers

In 10 to 15 years, they would come back and pave.

Aidan Waite

Ok and I want to cover parking just quickly, I want to get my three minutes in. I walk around Town two to three times a week. One thing that we talk about is our employees taking away our parking spaces. They really don't, that's a little bit of an exaggeration. But without employees, we don't have restaurants, we don't have stores in Town or anything else. We haven't found a good solution for employees. People say well, let's put them down there. Well, if you work at Town Tavern for instance, and you leave at two o'clock in the morning. A 19- or 20-year-old girl doesn't need to be walking somewhere on her own. Also, a lot of the employees are \$15 or less. So, the other thing, one more thing we talked about, we need more restaurants here in Blowing Rock and we do, this is hard for a lot of reasons. One, landlords charge ridiculous rents in our Town. Anybody who has a restaurant here that doesn't own it is paying crazy cost. The ambulance is something I could throw in a second, but I won't. I have been in food service for nearly 55 years. I'm a chef by trade, and anybody that walks by the house will see the license plate on my car that says Carolina Panthers chef. That's what I do, we need restaurants and need to find a way to get them here. Thank you very much.

Charlie Sellers

Tom Barrett.

Tom Barrett

Thank you, Mayor Sellers, Council, Town Manager. My name is Tom Barrett, I live at 204 West Green Hill Drive. I'm a full-time resident, Tina, and I've been here since 1998. So, we're full time for 25 years. I also want to say that I'm speaking personally as a private citizen with no affiliation with any organization. I come from the perspective of not only a business owner, but also as a full-time resident. We were fortunate enough to move here 25 years ago and build a company that made over \$10 billion of sales nationally. \$4 billion of those sales came from our offices here in Blowing Rock. We joined the Chamber in 1999 and we're only a member for a year. The reason for that was because of the scale of our company and because of our perspective nationally, we just didn't see the benefit of being a member of the local Chamber. Even though I have received leadership awards from the Raleigh Chamber, the United States Chamber of Commerce. There's been a lot of discussion about the value of tourism and the money the tourists put in our pockets. And I just wanted to remind us that, you know, the voters and the citizens put a lot of money into the economy here too. So, I went back and did some record checking over the last 25 years. As a couple Tina and I spend about \$50,000 a year in our

Town, all in. When I look at the real estate purchases we've made and the homes that we built here in the last 25 years, we have directly contributed over \$4 million to the budget and the economy in the Town of Blowing Rock, so we can feel that significant. As a business owner I also am concerned about cost and about debt. I realize we have great credit and great borrowing ability. So, I went back and looked, the parks and recreation Master Plan Capital Improvements for 10 years sets at \$5,342,500. The street/stormwater/sidewalk 10-year Capital Improvement plan is \$8,250,000. The water and wastewater 10-year Capital Improvement plan is \$34,575,000. That's a total identified capital needs currently on the table of \$48,167,500. The current debt service for the Town of Blowing Rock is approximately \$12 million. We're grateful for Ray Pickett who helped us get the \$4.8 million to offset the cost of water and sewer on Main Street, we're eternally grateful for that effort. That leaves us a net 10-year Capital Improvement needs request at \$43,367,500. In my view, personally, the underground utilities are a want of some \$4 million today for phase one, and at least another \$2.4 million in today's dollars for phase two, obviously at a higher cost at some point in the future. And that's if in fact that ever gets finished. The interruption to Town is almost two years and I heard from McGill the other night that the complete project including getting the poles down it's going to be about a seven-year affair from start to finish. We then look at the three separate trenches over the next two seasons, and the interruption on Main Street; that's interrupted to traffic, merchants, tourists, residence, shoppers, and staff. If you take the interest on the repayment of the loan, the loan becomes over \$8 million as a project. Most merchants, not all merchants, but many merchants at the end of their workday, turn their front door lock get in their car and drive to another community to eat their dinner and asleep. They don't live here.

Charlie Sellers

Tom, your time is close.

Tom Barrett

So, in essence what I'm asking is please vote no for this project. Thank you.

Charlie Sellers

Hunt Shuford, please state your name and address.

Hunt Shuford

My name is Hunt Shuford, my wife Grace and I own a home at home at 1196 Green Hill Road. A little bit of background, Blowing Rock has been part of my life basically since I can remember. I can even remember how long the ride up the mountain was from Hickory stuffed in the back of the station wagon, when it was just a two-lane road. And I will tell you that Blowing Rock will become our permanent home sooner rather than later if Grace has it her way. So, I speak here today for myself and for her. And I speak here as a taxpayer and someone who cares greatly about our Town. Like all municipalities we're faced with significantly rising costs simply due to inflation. Like many municipalities we are faced with a long list of critical infrastructure needs. In fact, Blowing Rock's may be larger than many on a relative basis. The \$45 million list presented at the Town Council winter retreat paints the picture. And I will say thanks as well to Representative Pickett, because he took that number from \$45 to \$40 million. And that's huge. You don't need me to recite the list you just heard it. Underground utilities on Main Street will no doubt look great. They would look great on Sunset, and they probably look good on other streets

as well. And just because we think we can finance it, in my opinion, doesn't mean we should do it. I prefer reliable running water sewer capability that will allow our residents currently on septic to hook on and improve stormwater management. We also need to address downtown parking with a sensible solution, greenways improve the quality of life for everyone. It's all about priorities and making the right choices. The underground utility project is simply a want versus a need. And benefits very, very few folks and will come at a financial expense to all of us hitting many of our full-time residents very hard, in my opinion, very unfairly. Not to mention creating extended disruption to the downtown. The word synergy and the phrase economies of scale get a lot of play. My experience has been that hanging your head on these concepts often leads to disappointment. Neither exists with the underground utility project beyond the cost of the asphalt overlay. And I can virtually assure you one that savings is a rounding error in the scheme of this project, and number two, and this is based on a lot of personal experience, having built a lot of roads, not as many as some people that have built a lot of routes, DOT will work with us. I've done it before. The underground utility project is a separate trench four feet wide, eight feet deep. There's no digging one trench and putting the water sewer and utilities in it. It simply doesn't work that way. And it never did. I'm leaving copies of this; it is a really simple analysis. But I think it's very understandable the cost of this project for anyone interested. Why are you thinking about \$40 million in net needs ever times, think about the all-in cost of this underground utility project and only runs from the church to the speckled trout 8.2-million-mark calculation including interest, real money, in my opinion. Another way to look at this number, and this is my analysis, I'll be happy to leave it is is the total cost of this project over 10 years, including interest, pick an interest rate, it really doesn't matter. But if you compress it all into one number, that number is 85% of the town's spendable budget the fiscal year that ends either this month or next I can't remember Stated differently. You're doing everything else meaning I'm gonna finish this everything else being equal. Doing this project will consume eight and a half percent of the town's spindle budget cost \$1 today for the next 10 years. The math on this project is just simply horrible.

Charlie Sellers

Cobb Milner, state your name and address.

Cobb Milner

My name is Cobb Milner, I live at 202 Gideon Ridge Road. My wife and I have been residents for 30 years, we've been business owners for 25 years. I love Blowing Rock. The downtown area of Blowing Rock is my downtown area. I shop on Main Street, I drink coffee on Main Street, I go to church on Main Street. But the powerlines are really the poles are on both sides of the road. There are three poles and 15 separate wires in front of St. Mary's Church. These include power cable phone, fiber optic, those who say don't bury the power lines we have what we have is good enough. To those I say good enough, is not good enough for Blowing Rock. I applaud Shane and his staff for giving us an option to make the beautification of Blowing Rock a reality. I implored the Council to consider not only those who are speaking tonight, but the people who will become residents here in 5 or 10 or 20 years from now. This is a long-term project. And it really looks at the beautification of the downtown area. Yes, it's a small tax increase. But this is our Town, our Main Street, when friends visit, I want to be able to walk Main Street and be proud of how beautiful our Town is. I'll say it again, good enough should not be and is not good enough for Blowing Rock. We are better than that. Thank you.

Charlie Sellers

Kristen Brown, state your name and address please.

Kristen Brown

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Kristen Brown, I live at 143 Brooker Street and most people who know me know that I keep my opinions to myself. So, the fact that I'm up here shaking in my shoes indicates how important this issue is. I'm a relatively recent addition to this community and I am a voter in Blowing Rock. No, I'm not a one issue voter. The fate of this proposal will have significant influence on my future votes. Being a new resident allows me to view issues with a fresh perspective. After hearing and processing the information that has been presented via many different outlets, there are a few facts that stand out in my mind. The water and sewer replacement are happening. There is no either this or that competition with the underground utilities. To me, it makes abundant sense that the most infrastructure improvements possible should be made while lines are being replaced. This includes installing the conduits necessary to run the utilities underground. Even if future Council's decide not to proceed. The foundation has been laid and can be built upon anytime in the future. As I understand it this has been a goal of the town for over 50 years, and there will never be a better opportunity. Other than beautification, very little has been said about other positive benefits, reliability and resilience during high winds, storms and natural disasters. Safety from hazard that comes from exposure to damaged power lines, the conservation of energy, underground cables have less resistance therefore have less loss of electricity being transmitted. In my job I speak to many visitors who comment on the Mayberry qualities of our town. I too saw these qualities in the many years I visited before moving here. Unfortunately, after moving here, I see that this facade is a sap thin paper thin. George Washington in his final address was speaking of division within the union of states his ideas can still be a warning here. The true motives of a sectionalist are to create distrust rivalries between regions and people to gain power and take control of the government. We must overcome our divisions and work together for the betterment of Blowing Rock. Otherwise, I fear for the future of this Town. Thank you very much.

Charlie Sellers

Sue Sweeting, state your name and address.

Sue Sweeting

I am Sue Sweeting; I live at 674 Chestnut Drive, and I want to thank all the Commissioners and the Mayor for your service. I consider myself blessed to live in Blowing Rock. I can think of several reasons to vote no for the underground utilities. The first reason is that many of the residents saw a 40% to 50% increase in their last property tax bill. Saddling residents with the burden of an additional tax increase for a want not a need does not seem fair. Second is the loss of at least six parking places that are crucial for business and short-term rental owners on Main Street. The third reason has to do with refinancing the fire department building loan. This loan will be paid off within the next two years. We currently pay \$200,000 a year for the loan. That money could then be used for needed infrastructure and capital improvement projects without a tax increase. Fourth there is no research that the state's underground utility increases the number of tourists to a town, tourists come to Blowing Rock because we are unique. We don't need to try and look like other towns. Finally hiring an interim manager who

will have the task of funding a \$6.4 million debt is asking a lot while he is trying to run an unfamiliar Town. Thank you.

John Grafe

Erica Brinker, state your name and address.

Erica Brinker

Hello, my name is Erica Brinker, and my address is 311 Flannery Fork Rd. Thank you for letting me get up here and share some comments, Town Council, and community members. I am a mom of three. I currently sit on the Blowing Rock Chamber Board, the Blowing Rock School PTO Board and I'm an active business owner in Town running the Speckled Trout Restaurant and Bottle Shop with my sister-in-law, Emily. I say all this to give insight into the commitment and pride I have in our village. I fully support the Main Street project in its full scope, specifically placing the power lines underground. The time is now this is part of the Town's 10-year strategic plan and has been a consideration since the 1960s. Two facts that can't and shouldn't be ignored. Nearly 40 poles and hundreds of wires are going to be removed from our streetscape. It will greatly enhance the aesthetic of downtown, which will inevitably increase economic prosperity. It allows for growth while maintaining the integrity and charm of our village. Due diligence collaboration with utilities and engineering has been completed and is ready for an award. It is truly a legacy project to be a part of. And I hope you vote to approve this project. I look forward to contributing our tax dollars to this amazing project. Thank you so much. Ben Powell, I think all the citizens showed up tonight. Name and address please.

Ben Powell

Ben Powell, 255 Country Club Rd, I am a taxpayer and voter. I'm not going to try and tell you all how to do your jobs because I don't know how to do them. And you guys have done a stupendous job, the Q & A session you ran was really impressive. In terms of the finances of the data, you've done your homework, and we elected you to make this decision. So, I'm not going to try and tell you how to do it or anything like that. Just share my perspective here. That's a really nice seal, I bet it wasn't cheap. I mean, I'd like to have one. That's a really nice park behind me too, it can't be cheap to maintain. We could sell that and pay down debt, pay down a lot of debt, but we don't, because it matters to us, right? The way the Town looks, beauty, these things matter to us it matters to our pride, our civic pride, and the underground utilities. That is an extravagance, but not really. I'm from Alabama, as my wife would say ala-freakin-bama and my little town. My little town got rid of the utilities from Main Street. And it was easier for them because they had some state funding. We're a wealthy town and that's why we can't get help. And that's why we have to pay, and I am just sharing this as a voter, it would definitely be worth it to me. And whenever I think of this, think about this Greek quote, it's a Greek proverb, it's something like communities grow great when old men plant trees, and who shaped them never sit. I think that's where they are, where we are, this isn't fair, you're being asked to do something that Council's years ago should have done, and it would have been much cheaper. And I'm being asked, we're being asked, or at least I'm asking folks to pay for something other taxpayers should have paid for long ago and it would have been much cheaper. But we didn't, they didn't they didn't, and that tumor gotten bigger and bigger until now it's expensive. We can pass it on to the next generation, it's going to be even bigger for them or we can bite the bullet and take care of it. And that's just the way it goes. Sometimes citizens are asked to step up to do more than their fair share. You know, Councils are

asked to do that, you know, managers and citizens and I'm just saying as one individual speaking only for myself, I'm willing to do that.

Charlie Sellers

Bill Hall, state your name and address.

Bill Hall

My name is Bill Hall, I live at 1551 Green Hill Road. I've been a permanent resident of Blowing Rock for 26 plus years. And a part time resident for about five years before that. And I have been an advocate for the last 20 years of getting the wires off the polls and off Main Street. Now, there's a lot of people that don't want that. And I respect that. But we have an opportunity now to do this. That we will not have again for many, many, many years. We're going to open the street up and replace the water and sewer lines, which must be done. And we can bury the electric lines as part of that. And I believe that the incremental cost will be less than what is estimated. At any rate, I hate for us to lose this opportunity. I have visited a number of towns in western North Carolina that had the power lines off Main Street. And people say well, you don't even notice them. But if they're not there, you do notice. And you look up and you see the sky and it's just beautiful. And so, I hope that the Council will consider strongly taking this opportunity because there won't be another opportunity for many years. And this will be a progressive move. Because you either stand still, or you move forward. And if you stand still, the world will pass you by. So, I think this is such a good opportunity that we should not miss it. Thank you.

Charlie Sellers

Janie Sellers. If I may go on the record, we are not related. I was gonna say that. My name is Janie Sellers, the Mayor and I are not related. Although I do consider him a friend. My husband and I live at 412 Wonderland Drive. I'd like to speak about two aspects of the underground utilities' proposal. First, the characterization of the project is once in a lifetime, or it won't get done for another 50 years. And the other topic is the gratitude that I feel, and I think we all owe to all of those who have worked so hard to make full information about this project available. No one in Council's position would want to be remembered as having passed up the opportunity of a lifetime. However, that's not what I think you would be doing if you voted tonight not to move forward with the proposal. It has been said that delaying the project until more urgent capital needs can be addressed will mean the project will be less affordable later. But I don't think that's something we can know today. Only one bid was received for the work. We're in a time of high demand for infrastructure, labor, and high interest rates. We also don't know what our tax base will look like down the road. There are at least two new businesses with big projects under construction right now. New homes are being built. We do know the current debt the Town will be rolling off over time thanks to Shane and Nicole's charts, and in greater amounts over the next 10 years that are scheduled in the next two years. This will also make a difference in available resources. I've heard it said there'll be synergies with the water and sewer work, but at the retreat and Town Hall it was made clear that this project will be very different requiring a third trench to be dug after the other two, and with different equipment and the fabrication of a duct bank as well as extensive work of utilities. By waiting the Town can avoid two consecutive seasons of disruption for our business district. The geologic information gained during the other work and the drawings that have already been prepared could continue to be usable and useful for later rebidding. The delay may even provide the time needed for an additional visitor parking to exist, which would help reduce the issue of temporary

loss of parking while the work is done. Some have said an advantage of doing the utilities work before Main Street is repaved is that the town would be able to take advantage of repaving it at the states expense. We have been informed by DOT that they'd expect to pave again in 10 to 15 years anyway. And can be flexible with their timing. Turning to my second point, I think we all owe a debt of gratitude to the individuals who've worked so energetically and long to bring the information needed. The Chamber's Task Force, the Town staff, the people at McGill, the utility providers, and I'm sure there are others. And I'd like to thank them. In conclusion, I would say in addition to the arguments that others have made, I urge Council not to be swayed by the once in a lifetime argument. And to vote no on moving ahead now with the underground utilities. Thank you. Richard Gambill, please state your name and address.

Richard Gambill

My name is Richard Gambill and I live at 129 Valley Road. And I'm not here to argue with the people that before me talked about \$45 million, and so forth. I'm going to talk about individual cost us. And here's my tax record for my house, our house. So, our house is valued at about \$1.2 million. But on taxes is valued at \$880,000. So, if Shane's presentation the other night was correct, a one cent tax increase means we're going to increase our taxes by \$88.00, \$88.00. Now, taxes are deductible when your federal income tax and state income tax. So, I use this number of 30% for federal tax, and 5% for state tax. So, we took 35% off my \$88. Now we're down to \$57. If I divide that by 2 Polly is paying \$28.50 and I'm paying \$28.50. So, what I'm trying to say is it's going to cost me \$28.50 to bury those power lines. If I have two glasses of wine at \$11 a glass plus tax, plus tip is \$28.50. So, I get two glasses of wine a year and the powerlines are paid for. It's just that simple. Now, the other point I'd like to make, there's art on the wall here and everybody here has art on the wall at their house. Does it add value to your house? No. Does this make you feel better? Yes. Will the powerlines add value, maybe, maybe not. But it will make us feel better. So, when you go home tonight, look at those pictures on the wall and see how much you enjoy those pictures. Is it worth \$88 to enjoy those pictures. Thank you.

Charlie Sellers

Ms. Jenny Miller.

Jenny Miller

Hi, my name is Jenny Miller and I live at 490 Goforth Rd with my husband, Wayne Miller, and a couple of our kids at the moment. Okay, I was gonna go into the tax ramifications. But Richard already did that and much more eloquently than I think I could have done. So, thank you, because there is stuff on Facebook saying on a \$500,000 house, your taxes will go up \$250. And that is wrong on a \$500,000 house even with a percent and a half increase, your taxes will go up \$75. That's about six glasses of wine. Okay, so experts agree across the country that investments and visual improvements of retail and commercial areas is one of the best ways to attract new businesses and new residents to stimulate our economic growth. Tourism means growth and, in this town, tourism also means lower taxes. And a friend of mine whose house she said was valued at \$550,000. She said to me, Jenny, I think that my taxes are gonna go \$400 if they bury the lines, I said no, they're gonna go up \$65. So, there's a lot of misinformation out there that I think we just need to be careful. You know, they're kind of scare tactics. So anyway, back to my points. It is pointed out by every consultant hired by this town, and they've spent a lot of money on consultants over the last decade. That overhead wires are a visual blight. They

mask the beauty of our Main Street, and they really detract from the character of our Town. Lonnie Webster, our resident photographer, when he sends pictures into periodicals and magazines, often they send them back to Lonnie and asked him to please Photoshop out the wires in those pictures and what does that say to all of us? So, to better answer this question of why we should bury the powerlines you know, why do we have flowers downtown? Why did we put up that beautiful rock garden at Sunset and 321? Why do we do landscape 321? Why do we put up Christmas decorations all the time? Why do we put up decorations for our seasonal time also, all of this is we spend money in our Town. And there's a reason for that. And burying your utility is a beautification project, but it will go on for generations and as residents I think of Blowing Rock, we have the responsibility as voters to vote for people that want to make our Town more beautiful. Some people say the Town has other priorities that are more pressing, to these people we can say the opportunity to deal with those other priorities will always remain but maybe the opportunity to bury our utilities in a cost-effective manner will disappear and a lot of people in this room have already talked to that so I can conclude. Please bury the powerlines, please make the future of our town such that more residents will want to move here and the residents that live here can enjoy our beauty. Thank you so much.

Mike Quinto

My name is Mike Quinto, I live at 342 Ransom Street. Also, Facebook fame. I'm gonna give y'all two numbers. This is really quick, really easy. Two numbers \$225 bucks. Anybody know what that is? It's the cost of a three-cent tax increase. Annual. \$18,000, anybody know what that is to pay that bill? That's your annual cost to be a member of the Country Club. We have millionaires and billionaires in here complaining about pennies. It's ridiculous. Thank you.

Charlie Sellers

Mike Quinto. Anybody want to take up the rest of Mike's time?

Mike Quinto

Brian Summers. Hello Brian.

Brian Summers

My name is Brian Summers. I live at 274 Elliott Circle in Hillwinds, I have been in Blowing Rock since 1994. Operate three businesses, I'm an industrial engineer. Anybody knows how you tell the difference between an introverted engineer and extroverted engineer. An introverted engineer looks at his shoes an extroverted engineer looks at your shoes. I'll struggle through this. I'm totally for underground power. Because it will improve the reliability of power. We operate a service center here in Blowing Rock where we service a little over 2,900 manufacturing clients. And when the power goes down, everybody panics and that's in 27 different countries. So, when the power goes off in downtown Blowing Rock, I get a lot of phone calls. But we also own the Hemlock Inn downtown. So, from a taxpayer standpoint, I pay taxes from my home, I pay taxes on my hotel, and I contribute to the TDA. So, I'm taxed three times. And I think this is the best money we can spend, to improve the reliability of power in downtown Blowing Rock. I'll give you a recent incident that happened last month, there was a lightning strike that hit the power poles in Blowing Rock, it lit up those power poles, it discharged into the sewer line of my building and fried a little over \$2,900 worth of electronics. If we would have had

underground power that wouldn't have happened. So, all I'm gonna say is I totally support underground power. It's time to do it. And do we have a Town engineer here?

Charlie Sellers

Yes, we do, but this is just for everyone to speak their three minutes. He will talk in a little bit.

Brian Summers

The question I have is when in the future will be cheaper than it is today. Thank you.

Charlie Sellers

William Brinker.

William Brinker

Good evening, Council, and community members, I am William Brinker and I live at 311 Flannery Fork Road, Blowing Rock. I'll keep this short because Charlie said if all these points have been duplicated to hold your breath. But as many of you know, I've been assisting the Town with this project since 2001. And I do believe we've provided sufficient information for the Council to make a good decision here. I had a bunch of highlights; this group did a really nice job of covering them. So, I am going to skip them all. And just let you know that I just want to encourage you all to make a vote based on what's good for this Town. And I understand that no matter how you vote, it's very clear that some people are gonna be happy and some people aren't. And that's a that's a decision I do not envy you for having to make day in and day out. And I do urge you to leave a legacy and stand up for what you believe is right. And as I've documented, no matter how you vote, I respect you for your vote, and will continue to serve you anyway I can.

Charlie Sellers

Thank you, Mr. Brinker. I am going to read a few letters from citizens who were unable to be here tonight. Mayor Sellers read letters from Linda Craig, Joe Bogdahn and Jean Kitchen. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you all for the time, effort and thought put in. There's no right answer, and there's no wrong answer. I just want to say thank you, thank you for all this. Now moving right along. This next subject is a SUP and Mr. Kevin Rothrock. Now, if you would like to speak on this particular subject, you would need to be sworn in because it is quasi-judicial. Is that correct Kevin?

Kevin Rothrock

That is correct.

Pete Gherini

Thank you, Kevin.

Hilari Hubner

Swore in the individuals who wished to speak.

Kevin Rothrock

So those that came up with me to be sworn in is Jill Berkin and John Grafe and they're requesting this special use permit tonight to add horticulture sales and a weekly farmers market down at the Blowing Rock Antiques store at 379 Sunset Drive. This property is 0.885 acres and is zoned central business and is located in the watershed. The proposed site is an expansion of the current Blowing Rock Antique Center, which is at the former Blowing Rock pharmacy location. The horticulture sales area will be in the rear of the property and located beyond the current paved parking lot. And then the weekly farmers market would be located in the parking area and take up about 8, 9 or 10 parking spaces during that period of time. Based on that proposal, the combination of the Antique Store and the proposed horticulture sales would require 22 parking spaces and then up to eight vendors at a farmer's market would require one additional parking space. With the retail space being used for the farmer's market, First Baptist Church has agreed to allow the applicant to use the gravel parking lot across from the church during the farmer's market events. The special use permit there is a requirement in there that they provide written documentation that they have this agreement in place. The development of the site will result in monitor increases in the impervious area, it's going to add a little bit of gravel and a new building that will be for their sales for the horticulture sales and those impervious surfaces should not exceed 500 square feet and so no additional stormwater measures are recommended for this site based on this very small area that they are gonna have gravel in this little small additional building along to the rear. What they propose is their vendor location for the farmer's market. I think they indicated Thursday but it could be a different day whatever they would like to do, I understand it's just weekly. I'll be glad to answer questions if I can. And then the applicant is here to answer questions or speak about what they will do down there.

Albert Yount

This is like an adjunct to the Antique shop that is there now.

Kevin Rothrock

Yes, it would be a combination, multiple uses on one piece of property.

Albert Yount

Are you notified everybody within legal limits?

Kevin Rothrock

Yes, sure have.

David Harwood

Can you clarify, is the 17.5 foot, is that an alleyway? Or is that access to the property?

Kevin Rothrock

It's part of the property, that property is shaped like that. And this goes out to Ransom Street.

David Harwood

Okay, is it used as a driveway now?

Kevin Rothrock

No.

David Harwood

Okay.

Kevin Rothrock

The idea would be to seal that off and not let traffic go through there.

David Harwood

Are there any requested variances?

Kevin Rothrock

No.

Charlie Sellers

Council?

Albert Yount

I'm just wondering why the owner that property isn't asking for this?

Kevin Rothrock

The owner of the property Mr. Graff is the applicant and he owns the business. He does not own the property.

Albert Yount

Who owns the Real Property.

Kevin Rothrock

Mr. Keller, Buddy Keller.

Albert Yount

Does he get the opportunity to get his say? I am just asking.

Kevin Rothrock

He's been notified. He was notified by mail.

John Grafe

Mr. Keller is aware of the project and he fully supports it.

Doug Matheson

Do you know what times might be, what the hours are going to be?

John Grafe

It will be every Thursday like it has been, but from 2pm to 6pm. The vendors we've spoken with have asked for an extra hour. And so we thought we'd do that and it will be better for everybody's business.

Charlie Sellers

John, can you talk about the product mix, what you're going to have there, is it going to be like it was before, if you're going to add some new things.

John Grafe

Some new things. The summer fresh flower farm the really sweet Asian people that always had the flower bouquets here. They've agreed to come back and they're thrilled about it. The Bluegoat Dairy farm from Vail that did the goat cheese product's, she's coming back. Nothing Bundt Cakes down in Hickory. We're going to have a cakes and pastries every week. There's a Town and Country farm from Lenoir, they're gonna do full vegetable market. Everything from the farm versus two or three things there'll be like going to Boone and seeing the whole display of every vegetable you could get from a vendor. High Country Fungi. They're going to do cultivated mushrooms. And what I'm really proud of and I've been down to meet with these nice people in Lenoir is the 4440 meat company, professional baseball player that is raising American Wagyu beef. They have a wonderful company in Lenoir. And he will come every week and do flash frozen Wagyu beef and fresh Wagyu beef, every market. And the High Bakery, they're in Boone, they do breads, pastries, scones, different things of that nature. And they've agreed to come as well. And the eighth spot we're working with someone hopefully, we'll know this coming week if they'll do fresh seafood, crab meat, shrimp, different fish, as well on site. So that's what we've proposed so far, bigger than the one that was here before with better variety and lots of fresh products.

Albert Yount

I want to ask a question of the attorney. Are you satisfied that the real property owner has not signed the application.

Allen Moseley

Typically we ask the property owner to sign the permit once the application is approved.

Albert Yount

Good, just checking.

Charlie Sellers

Do I have a motion to close the public hearing.

Pete Gherini

So moved.

Melissa Pickett

Second.

Charlie Sellers

The Public hearing is closed. Thank you, thoughts Council.

Albert Yount

You had me at Bundt cake.

Charlie Sellers

All I know is the flower girl's going to be back, and that keeps me out of trouble.

Doug Matheson

And I like the idea of something that we haven't had is having something that has a variety of vegetables. That's one of the things we have been a little lacking on. With that being said I make a motion to approve the SUP.

Charlie Sellers

Doug made a motion first. Do we have a second?

Pete Gherini

Second.

Charlie Sellers

Any additional discussion? How do you vote?

All

All in favor of the motion.

Charlie Sellers

Thank you. Good luck to you all. Okay, Chief Aaron Miller.

Aaron Miller

At the request of Council, I've come again tonight to discuss the possibility of increasing some of our parking enforcement measures in Town. Just as a little recap, currently the police department has budgeted \$8,000 a year for parking enforcement. Our enforcement season usually runs from the middle of May to about the end of October, about a 24-week period, and \$8,000 in the budget. That gives us about 15 to 18 hours per week of parking enforcement. Typically, our parking enforcement varies the days and times so we don't set patterns that people can predict and move their vehicles. So that's currently where we're today. We do charge \$10 per violation. As a matter of policy, we only issue one ticket per violator per day. And currently, the Town of Rock has no substantial measures in place for collections of those. So that's where we're currently. I put some numbers together just to give you some ideas of what the cost would be to enforce those parking times. If we went to a 40 hour per week, parking enforcement during that 24-week period, it would cost approximately \$24,000. Three-hour parking enforcement at all times and parking is in effect. So, there's a three-hour parking is from Monday through Saturday. I think it's from 8am to 7pm, if I'm not mistaken, it's 11 hours a day. So, for 11 hours a day 6 days a week would cost the Town approximately \$40,000 to do parking enforcement during all those times during that 24 week. For us to fully implement a graduated fine schedule, and

what I mean is the first citation \$10, second citation \$20 and so forth. And to have some real means of collections, which we currently don't have, but would require a lot of software. Software's one of the more expensive pieces of all this and would require software, at least two people. During those times, some digital chalking hardware, which is a smartphone with a license plate reading device or some way to digitally chalk tires. We've estimated that system for 24-week period would cost the Town somewhere in the neighborhood of \$100,000. The reason I say somewhere, and I don't have an exact number is the software costs are part of the piece that we would have to try to figure out with a vendor. So those are the numbers.

Charlie Sellers

Council if I may, this is another issue I think needs to be put to bed. And I feel like as a citizen and as Mayor, we have three options. One do nothing, two is put some teeth to the current ordinance increase the minimum first offense to \$25, second offense \$75 and third a wheel lock; that'll get some people's attention. Third, paid parking for Main Street, Sunset, Maple and Park Avenue. Keep the parking garages free, keep the pool area free. And Davant Field free. That's just a thought, those three ideas. I don't know how the Chief feels about it. But I feel like something needs to be done. Because we do have merchants saying they you know, they need more customers coming in their doors. And we have a number of merchants here tonight that I've heard from that say, they run their businesses, according to turns.

Shane Fox

I will just add that our current ordinance does not allow for option two or three. So anything that would be proposed tonight, that's outside of the current policy that we have in ordinance, that Chief mentioned just a few moments ago, would require a public notice and a secondary meeting that would then be a public hearing and adoption of any ordinance changes whether that's escalated fines, booting or to pay parking, or some type of hybrid in between those different examples, you wouldn't need to set that public hearing and have the ability for the public to speak for or against that proposed or those proposed changes to the ordinance.

Charlie Sellers

I would say moving forward, we take your first thing about putting some teeth into and raising the fees, and then move to the second and third, public notification so that we can get on with the rest of it. Because we should get started on it. So would you like to ask the chief to move forward with a format. First, second, third offense, increasing the fees. And then that would go out for public hearing. Correct Shane.

Shane Fox

It would, I think, the chief can speak in more details than that just in the sense of the number of hours we're talking. So, we are looking for a little bit more probably of a charge to Chief to be able to bring something back with some numbers. Because there is a budgetary factor here that is going to have to be considered that you'll have to consider as part of your decision, at the same time that you potentially would adopt that ordinance that there is going to be a monetary budgetary factor.

Pete Gherini

Chief what in your estimation is the right amount to charge and get people's attention?

Aaron Miller

In the previous parking proposals that I have presented a number of times, there was a proposed ordinance change in that packet. I would probably lean toward following that previously proposed ordinance change. I don't have that in front of me right this moment, but I would probably recommend that. That's relatively easy to do, there would be some cost if you went to system. My original proposal provided that violators who had outstanding citations that had not been paid over a period of time and had three or more violations, that those would be vehicles that may be targeted for booting. So, if we did go to a booting system, obviously, there's some cost to that equipment and those kinds of things. One of the issues we run into from an enforcement standpoint is our parking enforcement, people have to be able to know if this is your first, second or third violation. Without some software package that keeps track of that, we can, that they can, in real time in the field, look to to see how many citations they have received. That's going to be very, very difficult to accomplish. So, anything with a graduated fine system is going to require some probably expensive software. One of the previous vendors that we've been talking to before, when we were talking about parking, their enforcement software suite was \$42,000 a year. Now, in the previous proposal, they had waived that \$22,000 fee because it was a package deal. We were going to do some other things, so they waived that. We would have to talk to some different vendors, get some estimates, find out what that would cost. But, you know, one of the numbers I have in front of me right now is \$42,000 annually for the software licensing fee for software, that wouldn't be required to do that.

Charlie Sellers

How would you like the chief to go forward, guys, gals?

Melissa Pickett

Have him bring samples of the new ordinance to us and the cost to do all three of these things suggested. So, we know, costs of software, cost of officers being put into maintaining the whole time. And then that way we have the numbers we need to make a decision on. Right now, we don't have the information make a decision on.

Aaron Miller

Yeah, it was fairly short notice to bring some information, I haven't talked to any vendors yet.

Charlie Sellers

Can you get that together for the June meeting?

Doug Matheson

So, we're looking at what May through October?

Aaron Miller

Yes. Yeah, parking enforcement should start in about two weeks.

Melissa Pickett

Isn't our retreat usually in June?

Shane Fox

Yes.

Melissa Pickett

And we've already tabled the paid parking until the retreat. Is this something that we should put together with the paid parking? Would that make sense?

Shane Fox

I think a suggestion would be if it's favorable to have this on the June Town Council meeting and then you could follow at the retreat with action that could be taken if something is presented that you're looking to move towards. So, during the month of June, I think that's doable for staff present.

Aaron Miller

But just know that you're probably optimistically looking at August before anything could be implemented.

David Harwood

In our previous paid parking discussion, we were looking at revenue generated from everything being paid parking. As Mayor Sellers was saying, could we break that down more toward Main Street, Sunset so that we can see what we're offsetting here.

Aaron Miller

Sure, I can certainly.

David Harwood

The other.

Charlie Sellers

If I may, David. Shane has done that, have you not Shane and you've come up with a number.

Shane Fox

So as part of the original or the last, one of the parking presentations we had First Tron, which is our financial advisors. Put together an interactive template that would allow us to pick between streets, on street parking, off street parking, and that's still available. That's what we utilize to come up with some of the numbers that we presented during that and that can be brought back up and put here on the screen. In real time, streets can be added or eliminated. And it will give you the number of spaces based on that kind of assumption we used utilizing the TDA numbers for that. So yes, that's available, readily available anytime to do.

David Harwood

Chief, do you have, so of these \$24,000, \$40,000 and \$100,000 examples. Am I correct in assuming that to have an effective paid parking process and system, that we're probably looking more toward a

\$100,000 solution to have a paid parking system? Well, I'm thinking obviously we can scale up or down just for enforcement of what we have if we go to a paid parking, at some level.

Aaron Miller

Any level paid parking is gonna be required to have software and equipment, pay stations of some kind on the street. We wouldn't need as many pay stations, but you're still talking about \$10,000 for the pay station. I am estimating six pay stations, you're talking about \$100,000 in capital outlay. And then you're talking about the personnel to do the enforcement and whether you're going to do that year-round. If you do that year-round.

David Harwood

So, we've got the initial outlay, and I'm not trying to get into a paid parking discussion. Also trying to understand by taking one of these examples and enforcing the ordinances that we have in place. Is there some efficiency in going with software, everything now? So that if we do something later, we paid parking? We're ahead of the game.

Aaron Miller

Yes, some of the equipment, if you move forward with paid parking, we will have to have some of that equipment anyway. We would have to have some of those software suits set up and already in place anyway. So yes, those types of things could already be in place, even before paid parking.

Albert Yount

So, what I think you're saying to me is, if I get a parking ticket tomorrow, I pay you out of the goodness of my heart, I don't have to.

Aaron Miller

I'd rather not answer that in public.

Charlie Sellers

And scratch that from the minutes.

Albert Yount

Why didn't this come to the light of day when we were having a big powwow about paid parking last month?

Aaron Miller

I'm pretty sure it did.

Albert Yount

I know a person that brags that they've got a stack of them that they don't ever pay.

Charlie Sellers

That's why I said to Council, you do nothing, or you put some teeth to what you currently have, or you do paid parking. But I think for the business owners and the citizens' sake so they can find a place to

park and so the business owners can turn their spots in front of their businesses. I think we need to do something.

Aaron Miller

Questions, I'll be happy to try to get those numbers to you.

Charlie Sellers

So, do you want the chief to go forward with this? I would recommend two options. One, the current ordinance, putting teeth to it; first fine, second fine, third fine. Okay, and then I would recommend option two, some type of paid parking, you know, not all over Town. But that gives you two options. It gives two options for the citizens to look at, and the business owners. So that's just a thought. And a lot of that information you already have.

Aaron Miller

Right, I have it all.

Charlie Sellers

Yeah, and a lot of these we discussed at the winter retreat.

Aaron Miller

Right, so there shouldn't be anything new.

Doug Matheson

There's nothing though that we can do between now and August. August is gonna be the earliest.

Aaron Miller

We can increase the hours and times that we do parking enforcement, that can be done. As a matter of a budgetary adjustment, just adding money to our budget, we can increase that, providing we can find the manpower to fill the seasonal part time positions.

Doug Matheson

But we don't have a way of collecting, I don't see where it would offset that.

Aaron Miller

You're never going to collect enough in fines to offset.

Doug Matheson

Well, I mean if we're not collecting now.

Aaron Miller

I would have to look up the percentage and that's probably a number I should know. I apologize for not having that. But I can find out what our collection rate is currently. We do have that data available.

David Harwood

So as I understand it, you are going to bring us those numbers in June, and then we may take action to retreat.

Aaron Miller

Okay, sounds good. Thank you.

Charlie Sellers

Thank you chief. There was a vote for a break. Ladies and gentlemen, we're gonna take about a 15-minute break. All right, we are back in session. All right now we have the underground utilities discussion. Shane Fox.

Shane Fox

Mayor, I appreciate you allowing me to start this conversation, as we presented last Monday night at the Town Hall meeting. I briefly gave an introduction and I'll do the same tonight to give you a little bit of history with this particular project. So, in recent memory this project began in earnest last year at our winter retreat, which was in 2022. And from the presentation that was conducted then by the Chamber subcommittee that was formed. You all took a vote in March four to one to move forward with the hiring of McGill and Associates along with collaboration with Blue Ridge Energies to put together a bid ready document and scope for the project that did take place in December and January of 2022, and 2023, receiving one bid in January of this past year. And then a second bid process took place that concluded in February, again, with one bid received. And so tonight, we've got two presenters coming up first, Doug Chapman with McGill. He'll go over the scope of the project, along with presentation through the bidding selection and the solicitation process. And then our finance director, Nicole Norman, will come up and talk through the financial options that we've put together and then allow for questions. And of course, given the complexity of this topic, I'll be more than happy to answer questions as well. So, I'll turn it over to Doug Chapman. Now for him to come up and start the presentation with the scope of the project.

Doug Chapman

Thank you, Shane, Mayor, and Council, we're going to present some information as Shane mentioned. The underground utilities portion of the Main Street project is a portion of the project that hasn't been awarded yet. As we talked about at the retreat and then again in March, when we did the award on the water, sewer and sidewalk. The project was segregated into five divisions. One for water, one for sewer, one for sidewalks, one for the duct banks to install underground utilities, and one for paving and crosswalks and paver replacements. So, at the March meeting, the Town Council tentatively awarded the water, sewer and sidewalk to Iron Mountain Construction Company who was the low bidder on the project. Now tonight, we're going to talk about the underground utilities portion of that. So that will include power and communication lines from the Episcopal Church on the south end to El Rincon on the north end. And we've talked about this project as phase one, phase two, this is something we discussed at the Town Hall meeting last week. And we also talked about that at the retreat before we had bids. And the reason being is the first phase of that it's not a phase one, half of it, phase two half of it. Phase one is we're putting the conduits underground. So those are PVC conduits, there'll be encased in concrete, the trenches will be backfield and the street patched. And then some of the things like the vaults and transformer pad, some of those things will be set and that's for the whole project.

The second phase of the whole project is where the utility providers will come in and install the wires and make them active and get all the equipment working and hook up customers, switch over customers to the new system. So that is the way the project will phase out. What we're talking about awarding tonight would be phase one which is the duct bank portion of it the underground work. Something that I did mistakenly present at the Town Hall meeting last week, went back and confirmed, we're losing three parking spaces on Main Street. And one of those is right here near South Marke. There's one at Storie Street and one near Kilwins. And then there's one other space that will be lost right here at BRAHM. Its own Ginny Stevens Drive. So, it's sort of own street, sort of not, but it's not a parallel space. But in one of those spaces, there may be a few other spots where private parking might be lost off the street, but those are the on-street parking spots it will be lost as part of the project. So, I'm going to show just a few of the slides that have been presented before just for information that the Council has seen. This is sort of before and after rendering of the vault, the transformers and pedestals that are planned at the Episcopal Church on the corner of chestnut. Then you'll see the next one is the transformers and pedestals that would be installed in front of Storie Street. This is shown with a rock wall in front of it as a decorative feature. We have an allowance for some things like that, but that's not part of the construction bid item, that would be something that would be added at a later date. The last one you see is a similar thing near Kilwins. This is Kilwins here, the parking spaces right above it. Where we would have an area, and these would all be curb extensions that would have protective bollards around them and he would have the transformer switches and pedestals within that space. So that's just a rendering of what those would look like to give an idea. So, we have a budget summary. And this includes the things that would be necessary to provide the two phases of the project. Some of the costs are incurred by the utility providers by the work that they'll need to do and the materials they need to provide. Not all of it, but you see the cost that they've estimated, and that's the estimates that they provided to the task force. As part of this work a cost for reconnections, which is in phase two, the big line item you see the trenching and patching the \$2,905,879. That's the part that we're talking about awarding tonight as a change order to Iron Mountain for the Main Street project. If you'll recall, when we were awarded that in March, that was a tentative award. And because that was funded, as we have mentioned multiple times from state earmark, that money comes through the division of water infrastructure, and they had to approve the bid package and the award before we could actually sign contracts. So, they've approved that now the contractor has signed the contracts provided the bonds, and today we've delivered those contracts to the Town for the Town to sign. So, the contracts are being signed now, so there'll be executed in the coming week or so. And then we'll schedule a pre-construction conference for the water/sewer/ sidewalk piece. So, what we're talking about is adding this portion of the work to Iron Mountain's contract. At the same time, the conduit for the project, the way it was worked out with Blue Ridge is Blue Ridge would purchase all of the conduit, on their buying power. And that would be provided to the contractor for the contractor to install. So that's why you see that \$650,000 For conduits in that budget. We also have in the budget for the construction engineering for oversight during the work ongoing, we have a line item for contingency, there'll be some legal work to get the easements processed that'll be required as part of the project. Then Phase two will have the cost for all the utility providers to install their wires, transformers, pedestals, everything else to make the system active. And you see the breakdowns of those estimates as the numbers provided. So, phase one has a \$4.1 million budget. And phase two has a little over \$2.4 million for that budget for a total of \$6,530,000. So, I want to talk before we do specifics about the award, I want to talk a little bit about scheduling logistics. To clarify any questions there might be, assuming the decision to award is made

tonight. And the decision is to proceed. Over the next few months, the Town will be finalizing the phase one funding plan. And Nicole will talk a lot about that in just a moment. Then the local government commission has to approve that, we're targeting that to happen in August. And then later this year and early next year. The underground duct bank construction will begin. We talked about that at the Town Hall meeting. Generally speaking, the contractor says, and it's been mentioned here again tonight, we'll have water installed in a trench, sewer installed in a trench and electric conduit duct bank installed in a trench. So those are going to happen one at a time. And generally speaking, you start at the bottom, work your way up. And the contractor would like to do the duct banks last because at that point, they know what water lines are active. Because the ones I just put in, if they've got everybody switched over, and they know where the sewer lines are active. So, they're not worrying about digging into a water service. And creating a geyser in the middle of the street. So, the duck bank would happen after those other two generally. Now also recognize that we have water from one end of the Main Street to the other. And the duck bank is in the center. So, we're not doing duct bank the full extent of water. So, there's water happening well beyond the extent of the duct banks would. So, we would expect the duct bank to be complete at the end of 2024. And so, in later 2024, the Town will be making the financial plans of the financing for phase two. So that in 2025 and 2026. And we don't have the exact timelines from the utility providers on how long it's going to take them. But I want to say two years so nobody's over anticipating that this is gonna happen in 12 or 15 months. But during that time, the phase two wires will be installed, the facilities and it becomes active. And then all the overhead wires, poles and everything will have to be removed. So, I am going to back up to the budget. So, what we're talking about tonight is awarding the trenching and patching portion of the project to Iron Mountain Construction Company. They were the apparent low bidder, they've done this kind of work before, they are experienced, they have worked with the Town a lot before, and should the Town Council choose to move forward, we would recommend that we award the project to Iron Mountain as a change order to the original contract for Main Street for \$2,905,879. And that includes, if you go back to the bid tab, everything in division four, which is the duct banks and the areas with transformers, as well as a line item that was in division five, the paving item because that, right wrong or indifferent, that's the way we did it. The area at Laurel Lane, where all the pavers are at the plaza. That area is going to have to be excavated, and that area reinstalled for the duct banks. So, there's a line item for that was separate inside the paving bid. So that's why that's out of that separate piece. So do you want to turn it over to Nicole to talk about the funding financing piece of that. question

Charlie Sellers

Any questions so far Council? Okay, Nicole. Good evening.

Nicole Norman

I hope everybody's good. And right, so we're all set. I'm here to talk about the project funding overview and the planning that we have done and how to pay for this project if it's decided to move forward. And so, you can kind of know the ins and the outs of the different assumptions we're making and the different sources of funding that are out there and really dive into the numbers. So, we're starting off with you just heard from Doug, the project cost. So, these numbers are what Doug just presented \$4.1 million for phase one, \$2.4 million for phase two, for a total of \$6,000,530. So, we're taking this phase by phase because of the timing of the project, as Doug explained. So, phase one, this is a amortization schedule that we developed, based on some assumptions. We did not necessarily develop this on our

own, we collaborated with the local government commission, we had conference calls with an LGC team, kind of going over our thoughts, we talked with our financial advisors and our bond attorney. So, all of this has been discussed in theory with those specialists that we rely on. So first of all, you will see phase one project costs up here \$4,101,879. And you may look right here and say, wait a minute, that number is different. It is but there's a reason. So, we will get to that we're gonna circle back around to that. So, kind of remember that there's a reason for that difference. We are assuming a rate of 4.25% and a 15-year term, these terms were discussed as reasonable and realistic. They are a little bit conservative. The rate, you know, may come in four and a quarter, we don't know. But we are or are a little bit lower than that. But based on our most recent financings, and our financial advisors, sort of estimate, that's where we're basing our planning on. So total interest cost, you can see it down here at the bottom, total \$1,544,000. That is over the life of the loan, this would be a 15-year loan again. So that's our total interest. And so, this would require, so this project is interesting. I've never in all my time with the Town. I haven't had a project like this to figure out and the way that it's different is this is not our asset. You know, we're putting this conduit into the ground and then we're going to have somebody else's wires in there. So, they're going to maintenance it, they are going to keep up with it, and it's really not going to be ours. So, for collateral purposes with our lending agencies, you have to have something to use as collateral. Usually, it's very straightforward and easy. Your collateral is the asset that you're purchasing or building. We didn't have that option here. So, we had to get a little creative. And so, one of the options that was presented was to utilize an asset that the town already owns. Preferably something paid off, no debt on it, or something close to paid off, that had a value close to the loan amount that we're looking for. So, we looked at all the Town assets, and what we found was the fire station, that loan amount was \$4.7 million. And we are just a few years out from paying for that building off. So, utilizing that as collateral, we are actually able to refinance that building, and it looks like we would probably get a similar rate on that, that we already have. So, we're not hurting the loan there for the building, or raising the cost for the building in any way. So, when you see that difference there, the \$4.1 and \$4.571. Our difference is the principal amount left to pay off the emergency services building. So, we have to lump those together because we're refinancing the emergency service building and putting it together with this new debt. So here, as you've seen the debt, and this is how we would propose to pay for the debt. And you can see there, because you're declining your principal over time, your payments gonna go down over time. So, we've just targeted year one, how are we going to do year one. And this is kind of our funding box possible sources for the funding. The first thing we could utilize is the Town's portion of the EMS debt service. So basically, what we're paying already for the EMS building, this does not include the fire districts, also contribute to the debt service of that building. So, we didn't, we left those funds intact, we did not target those. So, they could still go towards paying down the building for the same term that it was going to be. We have a little bit of GO Bond roll off. That would happen. That has not already been worked into the budget and covering other debt. So that's what we have available. And then the BRAHM debt service is also near roll off, so we'd need to go ahead and pay that off. And we could utilize the funds that are currently being used and these funds are provided by the TDA, for servicing that debt towards this project. Now, just to keep things clean and clear, we did increase the TDA allocation by \$39,770 to kind of make our numbers a little rounder for tax rate increases. So, the tax rate increase based on this formula for repayment would be one cent, we are, a couple things to note a couple further things to note is that we are using today's value of a penny. So, today's assessed valuation, that value of a penny it changes every year. We hope it goes up and it usually goes up. But, you know, re-Val can change things there. So that's gonna depend on growth.

And then kind of going down to the next points. This also utilizes the Town's full debt service roll off capacity. Okay, so roll off capacity is where we're already paying this debt. And we're already using these dollars to pay on this debt. So, this debt comes off because we've paid it off. So, we have that funding still left because we're used to having to pay that debt service using those funds. So, this does utilize all of that roll off to fund it in this way. So, and it also as we talked about the additional TDA funding and utilization of the BRAHM parking facility roll off as well. So that's phase one. Now, phase two. So, phase two, you know, there's even more assumptions on this, because this is out to 25-26, we don't really know exactly when it's going to start, it's going to depend on how the construction goes. And even more, so we don't know what kind of rate we'll get. Just looking at the rates that have been over the past year, you know, we've been anywhere from 3.29% to 4.53%, in just a year's time. So, you know, for me to say that I feel like four and a half percent is where we'll end up, I'm not gonna tell you that I have no idea. I don't have a crystal ball. But that's just what we're using for our estimate. So here, again, you're gonna notice phase two, project cost, everybody heard Doug, say it's \$2,428,874. This number, again, is different. And so just like phase one, phase two, we have to find collateral also, same project, doing the same thing, same asset here. So, we, the only difference is, we do not have anything to refinance for this option. So, when you don't refinance something, you are required to use a portion of your loan to improve that asset that you're using as collateral. So, what we did just to be simple, we didn't have to use Town Hall, but that's an option it was, you know, the value was right. But you can also use a combination of two assets. So, this was just for planning purposes, I'm sure by the time 25-26 comes around, you know, we may need to do some things that we could utilize those funds for, maybe some other building. But that was just to keep it simple. So, starting from the top, we are assuming a market interest rate of four and a half percent, again, a 15-year term, we did defer principal here one year, and that was strategic our financial advisor said this is typical, and it is a way to structure your debt service. The thing that you wouldn't be doing by doing that is extending the timeframe of your loan. So, you still have to keep it within the 15 years, it just defers that principle one year. And we'll see. So that allows us to pay off additional debt in that year, that your time. So total interest for this phase would be \$1 million. Down here at the bottom. And as we said this requires utilization of Town Hall or similar asset to use as collateral for the loan. And the requirement of approximately for this level of debt is approximately \$200,000 worth of improvements. This again utilizes the town's full debt service roll off capacity. The next available roll off capacity. That's not I do want to say this too. We removed capital equipment from our roll off, we did not take that into account because capital equipment is cyclical. Soon as we roll some off, we roll some on, so that we didn't feel like we could count on that. But we did utilize everything else that was available. And noting there that the Public Works facility would be the next larger noncapital equipment debt to roll off in fiscal year 2930. So that would free up approximately \$100,000 worth of capacity in fiscal year 2930. Again, utilizing we know this is even further out. So, we're utilizing the current year's value of a penny again \$164,742. We know that will be different but we're just planning. So over here we're looking, we took this one two years out because we did the deferred principle here. So, year one is pretty easy. We have the Buxton property debt roll off. So that's \$200,000. And then we have a little bit of Go Bond debt roll off as well. Going on to year two, we're going to have additional roll off for the bond. So, we're taking that into account in two different areas, two different amounts there for the GO Bond roll off, and then the property roll off as well. Leaving a tax requirement of \$57,349,093 to service year two debt, and that is about three fourths of a penny on the tax rate, a third of a penny on the tax rate. These are

the same. Just points, just to remember about how we are the assumptions that we're making and the requirements to find it in this way. I'm sure there's questions.

David Harwood

What's a sunset date on the Buxton property.

Nicole Norman

25-26.

David Harwood

Okay, so that's why it's showing up.

Nicole Norman

For year one yes of phase two.

David Harwood

But should it be in year two of phase two?

Nicole Norman

No. So 25-26.

David Harwood

Oh, it's possible funding sources, Okay, sorry. Thank you.

Nicole Norman

Sure.

Shane Fox

And I would add, again, with this being a construction project, the timing of when this debt would be due, like when building a home or building a building, you got potential interest only to be paid here. So we've, we've tried to make some assumptions as we put this together, of what that would look like.

Doug Matheson

We're looking at probably close to \$2 million in interest. Playing both loans.

Nicole Norman

Yes, looks like \$2.5.

Doug Matheson

Okay, and we're exhausting all of our roll off's, at least for the next five years. And we're putting up pretty much everything that we have as collateral that we can collateralize for that kind of money.

Nicole Norman

I mean, I don't think we're putting, we're not putting up everything that we have for collateral, we're just pairing, what would be adequate value.

Shane Fox

So, in order to, I think, make it simpler, the project is six and a half million dollars, we've got to find six and a half million dollars' worth of assets to put up in phase one and phase two combined. And what that looks like, we think phase one is a little clearer. And what we've proposed because of the value of phase one, or the cost of phase one is larger than phase two. So, phase has some options there. But we need to be able to provide roughly six and a half million dollars' worth of collateral between the two phases, as security for the loans.

Charlie Sellers

So, the total, the total with interest is just a tad bit over \$9 million dollars, correct?

Albert Yount

Nicole Norman

Yes.

Albert Yount

Two questions, the fire department is paying what \$60,000 a year toward the debit and they have paid it since year one right. Correct. And we are not going to need that money. When is the current debt going to be paid to the fire department.

Nicole Norman

So, when do we pay off the emergency services building? We have two years remaining on the emergency services building.

Albert Yount

Does everything go along with that loan like it is now?

Nicole Norman

It rolls into this loan, but we can keep the fire department contribution consistent through what it would have been.

Albert Yount

That's a contractual agreement, is it not?

Shane Fox

Right. And here on phase one we did we did not include. So, it says the Town portion we did not include that \$60,000. So, we wouldn't allow, if this were to go forward, we wouldn't allow the fire department to finish out their two years of contractual obligation there of the \$60,000 a year.

Albert Yount

They've expressed no interest in continuing it for this.

Shane Fox

We have not asked but I would say no. That is given the fact that their original obligation was to the \$4.7 million original price of the fire department.

Albert Yount

Right. Are you going to come up with enough money to put a sign on the front of the building.

Shane Fox

Maybe that can be a part of the required upgrades to the building.

Albert Yount

Because there isn't one.

Charlie Sellers

We got a flagpole.

Albert Yount

That took 12 years.

Shane Fox

I would just like to make a point to Nicole, you know, one, this has been complex and is complex. We believe that if you were to move forward with this phase one, this is a potential plan. Phase two does provide a great deal of assumptions based on the timing, and rates and etc, within that, so just want to make that known is that. As Doug pointed out earlier, if you were to move forward tonight, there are still a series of steps here that we have to go through from the funding and financial options, including the LGC, including public hearings, including a bid process with banks to go through. So we've attempted, as we as staff do is provide you with options here that we believe, as we've shared with conversations with our financial advisors and the LGC as being a viable option here, but we still have a process to go through to get through the funding for phase one. And then Phase two would come at a later date, that would include again, a bid process to the bank's, a public hearing process, and then ultimately, LGC approval will be required.

Albert Yount

But you haven't directly talked to any lending institution as of now.

Nicole Norman

Yeah, First Trion did reach out to PNC Bank, because they are who we currently financed the fire station with. And they said they could do this. That they weren't concerned about being able to provide a loan with the structure, you know, knowing all the ins and outs.

Albert Yount

But you would shop that?

Nicole Norman

Yes.

Shane Fox

Yes, we are required to.

Albert Yount

Three bidders, not three, then you got to wait, like this thing?

Nicole Norman

I don't know. You're not required to get three bids for financing.

Albert Yount

Okay.

Nicole Norman

We've moved forward with one before if you recall the capital equipment. So that's allowable.

David Harwood

I have a question for Doug. But I want to make sure we give everybody an opportunity about financial.

Shane Fox

It is fair as complex agenda item this is to go back and forth if need be, as questions arise.

David Harwood

Can you give me some perspective? And this is probably not a fair question. Most of my questions to you aren't, I have a pretty good handle on the disruption for phase one. Phase two, I'm a little less clear about as a comparison, phase two, compared to phase one, in terms of pulling wires, removing powerlines, things of that nature. Can you offer any insight or enlightenment about comparing that disruption.

Doug Chapman

Where we have equipment facilities along the project, not just the, I mentioned three or four parking spaces, there are other spaces or places all throughout the project, that there will be facilities. At those points there will have to be, you're either putting wire in and pulling out the other end or vice versa, all throughout the project. So that has to happen. So, you can imagine at any given time, the utility providers are pulling and pushing and pulling from a spot to a location through Town. So, some places they may have to close the lane, some places they may not depending on what it is, or they may close parking spaces, etc. But they've got to be able to have, they're going to have pretty good-sized trucks. Now it'll be a little bit more when they take down the existing lines. But that won't last very long. So, it won't be as disruptive as putting the trenching in, but there will be downtime and we want people to know it's not just this window, there's phase one window and a phase two window of that work being

done. And there's five utility providers. Now, Blue Ridge has a lot more conduits and a lot more wires that they're pulling through than all the other utility providers do.

David Harwood

That's helpful, thank you.

Charlie Sellers

Have you determine where are you going to start, which end are you going to start, down here or are you going to start there and merge traffic?.

Doug Chapman

We haven't told the contractor where to start on any of the projects. Now we have told them we don't want them working multiple spots at the same time. I mean, you don't want to close a lane at Storie Street and close another one in front of the park and close another one down by the post office, we wouldn't want to do that. We want to try to keep working in an area at a time. So, we do minimize the disruption at a given time, but we didn't specify an order or a sequence that they work.

Doug Matheson

A couple of questions for you Doug, please sir. I know the state, DOT has agreed to do the paving. Are we gonna have any pavers torn up and who is going to replace that?

Doug Chapman

Yes, there will be some pavers that will be damaged or removed and put back as part of the water and sewer work. There may be some with underground utilities, probably not as much. But where we connect water taps, water meters and some sewer connections. The contractor that's doing the water and sewer will take those pavers out and put them back. So, they'll be taken care of all of that.

Doug Matheson

Have we secured most of the easements?

Doug Chapman

The task force has handled all of the easements, they've talked to all of the property owners. Now I don't think there has been legal agreements signed with all of them, but most of them they have an understanding with.

Shane Fox

So, another step and we've shared this, Blue Ridge has shared this, is that one of the requirements moving forward again, if tonight is to move forward with phase one, obtaining written agreements for those easements, there's a little bit of money put aside within the contingency that could be used for that. But that has not been done outside of verbal commitments at this point. So, nothing written has been obtained.

Charlie Sellers

Do we have a Plan B in place in case we can't get easements.

Doug Chapman

It would be my understanding; I think we're to that point. There's a few places where we've made changes to get facilities where property owners are agreeable with them.

Charlie Sellers

Shane will the Town make an effort to notify merchants along the route and homeowners about which area they're going to be working in so people can make appropriate plans.

Shane Fox

So, for the for the whole project, so water, sewer, sidewalk, etc, McGill's going to provide a website that's going to allow for usually a two-week window that will give insight to what areas the contractor is gonna be working in. So, we'll have that type of communication as well. Of course, we'll utilize the Town's ongoing social media presence and our current e-newsletter that comes out every week. To give those updates as well. So given the kind of a slow nature of this project, I think two weeks at a time would give at that point adequate notice of what areas are going to be working on. As Doug mentioned, and he can probably elaborate, on the water and sewer all this project, you can almost systematically see if they're starting south and working to north and then north to south, as they go through, they're not going to be and should not be stopping and starting in different areas. Hopefully, that's kind of a nice progression that you'll see in the project moving forward.

Charlie Sellers

So, when do you think that would start?

Shane Fox

So, we're thinking the water and sewer will start probably within the next 60 days.

Doug Chapman

Probably, maybe less. I would hope that sometime within June they can start.

Shane Fox

Underground utilities would happen after water and sewer is complete? We're thinking that's either late 23 or early 24. Again, water, sewer dependent, weather dependent, could change that. But that would be after the water and sewer is completed and taps have been made, pressurization has been obtained.

Albert Yount

So, after all this talk, do you envision all this being done and the lights are turned on from underground and the poles gone?

Doug Chapman

Right now, we're talking about at the end of 26.

Albert Yount

And the other question is we're talking about two phases, I understand that. Will there be one contract and the reason I'm asking that, when you finish phase one. There'll be I'm sure a delay. I don't know how you're gonna borrow the money or are you gonna borrow for everything or by things.

Shane Fox

By phase, so the plan is to utilize what's here on the screen. Phase one is everything that's included there for the \$4.1. So again, if you were to vote tonight to move forward with this, we would start soliciting bids for funding based on phase one. And then once phase one was nearing completion and we knew phase two was coming, we would have to go through the same process that would require, again, another bid process with banks and LGC approval, public hearing, Council approval at that time as well to move forward with that that financing.

Albert Yount

Well, the reason why I asking that is, if there's one contract it would be in total.

Doug Chapman

But it won't be one contract. If you look at and you can kind of, see it here. This \$2,905,000 that will be the contract with Iron Mountain to do the trenching work. Most of the other costs are associated with the utility providers. So, it'll be reimbursing them directly for wire, putting in connections, putting in transformers, putting in pedestals, etc. So those will, you know, those will be individually as well as the conduit for the trenching.

Albert Yount

So, the reason I'm asking that is, and this is way out there. But we finish phase one, and there's another Council here. We can't dictate to that Council. What if they say, we're not gonna do that. Then we have got \$4 million in the ground? That's my question. I don't expect that to happen but I'm asking.

Charlie Sellers

What you're asking is can you borrow the whole \$6 million and go forward. But you can't though.

Albert Yount

No, I'm asking if you have one contract, then it's the entirety of the project to me. You're saying phase one and phase two are different. You've got a gap period there, that's concerning me.

Doug Chapman

Yeah, I mean because it's different work provided by different people, there will have to be a separation of the two pieces. It can't be one contract. And because it's going to be that way, if I understand correctly, this probably in a Nicole question, but I am going to answer it. You didn't ask it. But you have once you borrow the money, you have 36 months to spend it. So that's why we can't borrow phase two money now because we may not spend it in time.

Albert Yount

I understand that, but it still doesn't answer my question.

Charlie Sellers

What they are saying Albert is phase two, we are paying for the utilities, because they're the ones who are going to be putting wires.

Albert Yount

I understand but.

Shane Fox

To answer the question is correct. So, there is two phases to this, phase one is to be discussed and potentially decided tonight, phase two is going to be discussed and decided at a later date. And you have no ability tonight to make that decision for phase two, that will be whatever Council that is sitting here at that time to make that decision.

Albert Yount

So somewhat a can of rolling dice.

Shane Fox

So phase one will include all the necessary pieces you see here to get the conduit in the ground, and then phase two will come at a later date yet to be determined. That will then have to be approved by the Council to move forward along with the funding. So yes, there is a gap and two clear decisions there that have to be made.

Charlie Sellers

Council, if we've finished our questions, do we have a motion of some sort? Yeah, I'd like to make a motion to move forward with phase one of the project as presented. Okay, so we have a motion to move forward with phase one of the utility project. Do we have a second.

Pete Gherini

Second.

Charlie Sellers

Okay we have a Second. Discussion, this is for phase one.

Albert Yount

Well is it proper to ask are we doing this for phase two?

Shane Fox

There will have to be some approval process. The Council undertakes what that looks like will be determined at that time.

Albert Yount

At that time.

Shane Fox

At that time, not tonight.

Charlie Sellers

Yes.

Albert Yount

Well that about answers my question. So, we're not voting on phase two tonight at all.

Shane Fox

No, we showed phase two tonight with a lot of assumptions to be able to give you the ability to see hopefully, the project as a whole with the best knowledge and assumptions we can make.

Charlie Sellers

Any further discussion any points. Okay, we have a motion on the table, we have a second no further discussion.

David Harwood

I just like to make a couple of comments. I do want to thank everybody for coming out tonight and sharing their thoughts and opinions and their ideas. It's apparent that you care about Blowing Rock, and what's best for our village. And it's that kind of passion that makes us successful. So regardless of what your opinion is, I appreciate it. And the sharing of that. I want to also thank everybody that did work hard to put us in a position to be educated about this. I appreciate the Chamber of Commerce assistants, Mr. Chapman and McGill, for their expertise, Mr. Fox and Ms. Norman, for giving us financial background, you've worked very hard. I'd also like to thank our utility project partners, and the underground utilities task force. But I want to save my last thank you for William Brinker. I really appreciate you shepherding this idea along. And literally hundreds of hours that you put into this. Your personal time to bring clarity to it. I'm very appreciative of that.

Charlie Sellers

We have a first, we have a second. Albert, how do you vote?

Albert Yount

I think the costs are too high, the needs is too few and the returns too limited and I vote no.

Charlie Sellers

Mr. Harwood?

David Harwood

I vote yes. I think that the Town needs this. I think I want the Town to be the best Town that it can be. To do that requires continual investment in infrastructure, personnel, and services and parks and aesthetics, and in strategic planning. And this Town and this Council and prior Councils have made great strides over the last five or six years in all of those areas. We are financially solid, well managed, attractive municipality, period. But we can't rest on our laurels. We've been a tourist driven economy for 150 years. And the heart of Blowing Rock is it's downtown. People come here to escape the mundane.

Like myself, they come here because they want a unique experience, an ambience that they can't find elsewhere. I think if we were honest with ourselves, none of us would have made an investment in Blowing Rock if this downtown did not exist. So, all of those features have been the product of long-term strategies and goals. And our short-term thinking should be feeding those long-term goals, not our fears. I don't think this is merely a beautification project. I don't think it's merely for the tourist. That's short-term thinking and improving downtown improves everybody. It brings community pride. And I would argue that it raises property values across this municipality. Those increased property values are important.

Charlie Sellers

David, we're currently voting on this.

David Harwood

And I'm making my vote and my statement. This is my three minutes Mayor.

Charlie Sellers

Got it.

David Harwood

So, I vote yes. Thank you.

Melissa Pickett

I'm going to have to vote no, this has been the hardest decision for me. I have gone back and forth and back and forth. But with \$40 million worth of infrastructure that still needs to be fixed, I just, I can't bring myself to vote for this project.

Charlie Sellers

Melissa.

Doug Matheson

I also will have to vote no on this. I see too many other projects that we need, to me that takes more importance.

Charlie Sellers

Pete?

Pete Gherini

Yes. Okay. It's a three to two vote, so it does not pass. Alright, ladies and gentlemen, once again, I would like to, and I didn't mean to cut you short, David. I knew where you were going with this. And I just want to try to emphasize a lot of this needed to be done in discussion. But you know, what I mirror exactly what you're saying. And I thank the Brinker's and all those involved for all the time that they put into it. And all the citizens for and against, and all their thoughts and ideas. And now it's time to get our community back together. Don't you think David.

David Harwood

I absolutely agree.

Charlie Sellers

Excellent. All right, moving on. We have official reports. As we all know, Shane Fox is leaving. Well, we have really gone a long way with Mr. Foxe's four years. My hat's off to him. And you can't fault somebody for bettering their career and moving up. And I just want to say as Mayor, thank you, Mr. Fox. And I wish you the best. And I want you to know that we're always going to be here for you. And if we had a key to the Town, we'd give it to you. But I don't think the Council or either I have, we don't have one. No, you have a key to Town Hall. Okay. But moving right along. The process moving forward is we're in the midst of looking for an interim Town Manager's, which that interim will be in place while we look for a permanent Town Manager. That process is pretty lengthy. The Council is heavily involved with that. They go through the interview process; they go through meeting these groups of individuals multiple times before they make a decision to hire that particular individual. So, the timeline on that right now, we're just we're moving forward on hiring an interim. And then that person will be introduced to the citizens when that happens. And then we will start interviewing permanents. There is a budget meeting on May 18. That's when we find out, Mayor and Council on what the recommended budget is moving forward for 23-24. That meeting is from 1-5. Correct. And if I can, we are going to have the budget made available to the public this Friday. So, we are going to release that to Council and to the public this Friday the 12th and then the 18th will be the workshop. Okay, so the budget will be made public. You all see it the same time we do.

Shane Fox

That's right. The budget will be made public online and a hard copy will be here at Town Hall. That is on Friday, the 12th.

Charlie Sellers

Okay, and thanks to the Historical Society, foundation, other many groups. The History Walk ribbon cutting will be June 1. And that will be at the entrance to Laurel Lane with festivities at the Legion Hall. So that will be June 1 at 4:00pm. Thank you.

Albert Yount

Oh, just a couple things, Shane and I have become pretty close. I think you'd agree.

Shane Fox

I would.

Albert Yount

So, it's a personal loss to me my friend. Shane is going to a small county north of Hickory, which is becoming a bedroom of Hickory. They have a \$53 million a year budget, and they have zero debt, none. That's what we need to be shooting for somehow. But it's a pretty big chunk. But not only is Shane one of the best managers I've ever known. And I've been around here for four of them. Shane's father served two terms in Vietnam, two tours. And he got the germ of the thing called Agent Orange, and it killed him. But in his last days, that gentleman right there brought his father into his own house.

Or he would have been destitute or in the VA hospital where they let you fall out of the bed to get rid of you. That's the mark of a man. And when we see him leave here take a look, there is a real man. The other thing in my part time I'm the commander of the American Legion post here and on the 27th of this month at 11 o'clock at the Pavilion, Hunt Broyhill has procured Admiral of the US Navy. He was the commander of Seal Team Six. Seal Team Six is who killed Osama Bin Laden, how he could get a man of that stature here is quite a bit of work. So, it's free, come. I'm sure he gave a good speech and now that's all I have got to say.

David Harwood

That's a hard act to follow. Obviously, Shane, you know my admiration for you, and I have talked to you about that in private. But I wasn't on the Council when you got here, so it doesn't bother me. Which is a complete lie. I really appreciate your leadership. I know the staff adores you. I appreciate you helping a freshman Council Member find my way and as much as I thought I knew about Council, I didn't. And I really appreciate your guidance. I am so appreciative of you bringing us through COVID, those were my first days on this Council and that was challenging but I know it was 10 times as challenging for you and it was just an exemplary performance and thank you for that. You're going to be missed literally and figuratively big shoes to fill.

Melissa Pickett

You are going to be seriously missed Shane, and seriously hard to replace. I'm a little offended that Ray got to hire you and you leave on my watch, but that's okay. We are certainly going to miss you.

Doug Matheson

Like Albert, I have been around for four of the managers, but you were the first manager that we hired that when you did your interview, we knew we had our man, and we didn't need to go any further. And that is was something I can say the highest compliment to you. And I feel that we made the right decision then and I hate to see that it's coming to an end. Because I've never had as good of a working relationship with someone as with you. I appreciate you.

Charlie Sellers

Shane, thank you. It would be hard to eco what everyone else has said. So I won't take a lot of time. We'll miss you and good luck, get a lot of education down there and in years coming, come back and take over Watauga County. Mr. Moseley.

Allen Moseley

I guess I should continue with the Shane love fest.

Shane Fox

Don't feel obligated Allen.

Allen Moseley

I have had the pleasure to work with every single manager that the Town has had, and this one is the best the Town has ever had. He will be a hard act to follow to replace him, but I'm sure we'll find somebody who is as qualified. But thanks for everything you've done for me. I appreciate it.

Charlie Sellers

Normally, Allen didn't say anything.

Shane Fox

I'll give dates again, before I say my last piece here, the budget will be made public, this Friday the 12 for everyone. And then on the 18th at one o'clock, we will have our budget workshop in this room. And that's open to the public from one to five. That is not for public comment, the public hearing will take place at the June Town Council meeting. And then the potential for budget adoption would follow that meeting either that night or at a later date prior to July 1. Want to mention my four short years here does not compare to Barry Ford's 32 years. And so, Mr. Barry Ford, who most everyone knew, drove our sanitation truck for almost if not the entire 32 years he was here, decided to retire now a couple of weeks ago. And I believe from pictures I saw today is enjoying at least this week, and maybe other weeks fishing and so 32 years of service to this Town. So, I feel obliged, obviously, to mention that tonight. And then a little embarrassed that my four years here seems to be so little compared to that. But four years ago, I came in with the Rainy Lodge topic if anybody remembers that. So that was a fun beginning. And then tonight, obviously, underground utilities, I think is a good way to book in the four years with COVID in the middle. And so, four years ago, I would say you took a chance on me because I had not been a Town Manager, I had been in the second seat or an Executive Director at the COG. But this was my first Town Manager position. And those Council Members at the time, some of which are in this room and others were here earlier tonight, took a chance. And I do mean that on an unknown that provided four wonderful years for me to be able to lead this Town. And I'm appreciative of everyone that gave me a chance then and each one of you for allowing me to do my job and lead the Town. And I believe a better spot than it was four years ago. And I'm proud of the accomplishments we've made with projects. I'm proud of the accomplishments that we've made with staff. And I'm proud to be able to sit here tonight and say that for four years, the Town staff allowed me to find my way as their leader. And we have been through many bursts. We've been through unfortunate deaths. We've been through a lot of good times, and we've been through a lot of tears during those four years. And when I mentioned that this is a family it is, and it's been a family to me. And I appreciate everybody giving me a chance to be your Town Manager for four years.

Charlie Sellers

Okay ladies and gentlemen, we're going to take about a 10-minute recess, and then we're going to go into closed session. There should be no decisions made.

Albert Yount

Per General Statute 143-318.11.(6)

Charlie Sellers

Thank you for coming.

MAYOR _____

Charlie Sellers

ATTEST _____

Hilari Hubner, Town Clerk

ATTACHMENTS

Budget Amendment #2023-09 – Attachment A

Tax Release #2022-09 – Attachment B

Tax Refund #2022-10 – Attachment C

SUP 2023-03 Gardener's Galley and BR Farmer's Market – Attachment D