

March 20, 2024 Budget Retreat

Meeting minutes

Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Marla Thompson at 9:05 a.m.

Invocation/Opening Comments

Town Manager James Cozart provided the opening comments and led the invocation.

Adoption of Doris Yates Proclamation

Town Clerk, Heather Minor, provided information pertaining to the adoption of proclamation for Doris Yates, recognizing her 100th birthday.

Alderman Allen Bumgarner made a motion to adopt the Doris Yates Proclamation. The motion was seconded by Alderman Tim Hertzell. The motion to adopt the proclamation was unanimous.

FY 2024-2025 Budget Projections

Town Manager Cozart also provided the fiscal year 2024-2025 budget projections, including an overview of the general fund's revenues and expenses, along with details for planned revenue increases and insurance premiums estimates. The board was informed about the need for cost-of-living adjustments for employees and the projected tax rate. There was discussion around possibly lowering the tax rate, but the board decided to revisit the topic after department budget discussions.

Deputy Finance Director Denise Collins highlighted the utility fund, proposing we pass along the 5% increase in water/sewer that we received from City of Hickory to our citizens plus \$1.00. She also noted that Republic Services would be increasing their costs by 5.3%, which we would also pass along to our citizens. The renter deposit fee was proposed with a \$10 increase from \$140 to \$150.

Police Department Budget Request/Discussion 10:15 a.m.

Police Chief Bates presented the department's budget request, emphasizing the challenges in recruiting and retaining quality police officers amid a competitive environment following the "great resignation" that began in 2020. The request included details on pay structures, technology needs, and an improvement of the motor fleet. The Police Chief advocated for officer retention as a solution to the recruitment challenge, proposing adjustments in salaries, including a shift premium pay for night shifts. Police Chief Bates also discussed the proposal of a Bonus Time Bank for the officers who used up their sick time (or any officer that worked through the COVID-19 pandemic.) Police Chief Bates noted that this wouldn't cost the town any money, as it isn't something that has to be paid out if an officer leaves, it is a bonus that they would lose.

Police Chief Bates covered additional needs of the Animal Services department, as well.

Fire Department Budget Request/Discussion 11:15 a.m.

Fire Chief James Brinkley presented their budget request, detailing recent ISO rating deficiencies and action plans to address those concerns. The budget request included staffing needs, vehicles, equipment, and other operational costs geared toward improving department response times and effectiveness.

Lunch

The board recessed for lunch 12:10 p.m.

A motion to recess for lunch was made by Alderman Tim Hertzell and seconded by Alderman Allen Bumgarner. The motion to recess for lunch was unanimous.

Department Budget Discussion – Continued 1:00 p.m.

Return from Recess - Reopen Meeting

A motion to reopen the meeting from being recessed was made by Mayor Pro Tempore/Alderman Gary Lingerfelt. The motion was seconded by Alderman Tim Hertz. The motion to reopen the meeting was unanimous.

Public Works/Street Department Request/Discussion 1:00 p.m.

Public Works Director Chris Eckard requested landscaping around the rec center, particularly the removal of existing mulch and replacement with rock to beautify and reduce maintenance needs. A quote for complete work including digging and installation was provided, also noting the removal plan included the building but not the gazebo.

Public Works Director Chris Eckard also requested a new leaf truck and provided a quote with the option of buying, as well as the option of Municipal Leasing through Southern Vac. An additional request was made for a Vac Truck for sewer, as our current truck is a late 1960s model fire truck that was converted into a Vac Truck.

WPCOG Presentation 2:00 p.m.

WPCOG Grant Study - Alison Adams

Alison Adams, WPCOG Planning Director presented the scope of a comprehensive parks and rec plan, highlighting the aim to align with PARTF (Parks and Recreation Trust Fund) guidelines for grant eligibility. The plan would include a public needs assessment survey, inventory of existing facilities, identification of new opportunities, and an implementation strategy. Deliverables also comprise mappings of park facilities and resources. The cost for the WPCOG to conduct this grant study was proposed to be \$22,000.

WPCOG Code Enforcement - Curt Willis

Curt Willis, WPCOG Code Enforcement Manager, discussed enhanced code enforcement services through WPCOG, including capabilities to proactively address minimum housing, nuisance violations, and junk vehicles. He outlined a process of notice, investigation, and enforcement, leading to legal orders and potential demolition or clearing operations as last resorts. He recommended updating Long View's ordinances to current standards and proposed a holistic approach to create cleaner and safer communities through consistent enforcement. He noted that a 2-year contract for Code Enforcement through WPCOG would roughly cost \$21,000.

Risk Management 3:00 p.m.

Alex Smith, the Risk Manager, recapped activities since July, including the handling of workers' comp claims and site inspections post-accidents or incidents involving town property. He outlined the benefits of being present for emergencies and investigations, managed Department of Labor inspections, and contributed to training standards across departments.

He explained goals to train all town staff in CPR, AED usage, PPE utilization, and create standard operating guidelines to promote a safer workplace. The Risk Management department proposed a budget increase, detailing necessary expenditures which included physicals, evaluations, drug testing, equipment, training, and miscellaneous needs associated with risk management and staff safety.

Final Comments and Adjournment

At the conclusion of the Budget Retreat, the board was reminded of the Budget Work Session scheduled for Wednesday, May 1st at 4:00p.m. for the presentation of a draft budget based upon the recommendations they had heard and made during the Budget Retreat.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Alderman Tim Hertz and seconded by Alderman Phyllis Pennington. The motion to adjourn was unanimous.

The Budget Retreat adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

Budget Retreat Attendance

Board Members Present: Mayor Marla Thompson, Alderman Genita Hill, Mayor Pro Tempore/Alderman Gary Lingerfelt, Alderman Allen Bumgarner, Alderman Tim Hertz, and Alderman Phyllis Pennington.

Staff Present:

Town Manager James Cozart, Finance Director Melissa Lalonde, Deputy Finance Director Denise Collins, Town Clerk, Heather Minor, Police Chief TJ Bates, Police Major Justin Reid, Police Captain Dennis Hardin, Police Lieutenant Davey Anderson, Fire Chief James Brinkley, Deputy Fire Chief Tyler Keener, Fire Captain/Risk Manager Alex Smith.

Western Piedmont Council of Government (WPCOG)

Alison Adams- Community & Regional Planning Director
Curt Willis- Code Enforcement Manager