

**REGULAR MEETING – BOARD OF DIRECTORS
BLUEFIELD, MERCER COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA**

January 10, 2017

NOON

A regular meeting of the Board of Directors of the City of Bluefield, Mercer County, West Virginia was held on Tuesday, January 10, 2017, at noon in the Municipal Building Boardroom. Present were Mayor Thomas J. Cole, Vice Mayor Barbara Thompson-Smith, Director Ellen Light, Director Michael Gibson, Director Chuck McGonagle, City Manager Dane Rideout, Assistant City Manager Joshua Cline, City Attorney Brian Cochran, Community and Economic Development Director Jim Spencer and City Clerk Bobbi Kersey. City Treasurer Kelly Davis was absent.

INVOCATION – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – CALL TO ORDER

Vice Mayor Barbara Thompson-Smith invoked divine guidance for the conduct of the meeting and led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

Mayor Thomas J. Cole called the meeting to order.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Director Ellen Light moved that the minutes of the December 13, 2016, USDA Public Hearing be approved as presented; unanimously approved and so ordered.

Vice Mayor Barbara Thompson Smith moved that the minutes of the December 13, 2016, Sanitary Board Franchise Agreement be approved as presented; unanimously approved and so ordered.

Director Chuck McGonagle moved that the minutes of the December 13, 2016, Board of Directors meeting be approved as presented; unanimously approved and so ordered.

Recognition

City Manager Dane Rideout recognized Parks and Recreation Athletic Director Rodney Kasey for graduating in December 2016 from Liberty University, Cum Laude, with a Master's of Science in Sports Administration. Mr. Kasey played basketball at Bluefield College (2011 – 2015) and is now the assistant coach at Bluefield State College for men's basketball. City Manager Rideout thanked Mr. Kasey for the vesting in our community.

CITY MANAGER DANE RIDEOUT

Town Hall Meeting; Annual Review is scheduled January 31, 2017, Bluefield Area Arts Center, 500 Bland Street at 6:00 p.m. The City will be presenting the 2016 year-end review and discuss plans for 2017. The public is welcome.

County Litter Control Officer has been in town working with Code Enforcement. The County Control Officer has the ability to cite offenders at a much higher level and has access to more effective surveillance equipment. This is all about cleaning up the City and preserving our assets.

Snow Removal reminder that primary roads are treated first. Oakhurst Avenue is treated due to being a primary feeder road from Grassy Branch. Due to the extreme low temperatures, citizens were reminded that salt is not effective. Also affected by the extremely low temperatures were the trucks' hydraulic systems.

Leaf Removal is over for the season. Public works collected over one hundred loads of leaves this season.

Holiday of Lights had a very successful season. More than 55,000 visited the park this year. Thank you to Nick Harrison, his crew, Lori Mills, and all the volunteers for the countless hours and time spent on the beautiful display. Donations pay for the electrical expense and purchase lights. Next year the goal is to have over one million lights on display.

City Hall will be reorganizing in the coming months. Due to Magistrate Court leaving the second floor vacant, the city will utilize the space by moving the Treasury Department downstairs. Citizens will have a “one stop” area to pay fees (Treasury Department), permits (Code Enforcement), and Sanitary and Storm Water bills. Some of the police detectives will relocate to the second floor.

Parks and Recreation is now in Phase II using the Hill Studio plans for renovations. The facility is now air-conditioned and the windows replaced. The facility is now code and safety compliant.

Code Enforcement is completing demolitions and Lori Mills continues with rental inspections. Two employees are taking asbestos abatement training.

Police Department

- Calls for service – 769
- Citations – 480 (306 warning citations)

Fire Department:

- Saturday morning apartment fire on Union Street. Patrol officer Ross and Firefighter Lucas saved two very scared children inside the house.
- Car fire on the Kmart parking lot.
- Fire on Hill Street.

City Hall is changing to LED lights. The next step will be to change city streetlights to more energy saving LED lights. The change could result in a 60% to 80% energy savings and the lights will last longer.

Community and Economic Development Director Jim Spencer gave the following report:

- The action item on the agenda concerning approval of agreement with Region I Planning and Development Council is for administrative services provided with the Commercialization Station. Region I Planning and Development Council helped develop the grant application and we would like them to assist with quarterly reports and other documents. Region I will work for the city and the grant pays for their services.
- The EDA will take a lien on the Freight Station Building for approximately fifteen years. This ensures that the grant money goes to the Commercialization Station. If the building is liquidated or sold the money returns to the EDA. This will be an action item for the next meeting.
- Community and Economic Development Director Spencer and his team are compiling a Business Incubation Management Plan. It is important to have a record of clear and concise plans on such a large project. Plans are required by the EDA by the final draw down. He will be applying for a small grant from BB & T to help pay for an outside incubation consultant to review and help with the policies.
- This year businesses were surveyed three times. The final survey was on Small Business Saturday. Various training events and a monthly calendar for business owners will soon be available. There were four training events in the last quarter. One way to help market a business is through education.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Matt Pokorney, Bluefield citizen, expressed concerned about smoke from his neighbor's wood stove. Mr. Pokorney stated he has contacted and discussed the problem with Code Enforcement, Bluefield Fire Department and the Bluefield Police Department. He feels the smoke is making his family ill. According to his testimony, his neighbor is difficult to engage in conversation and they are at an impasse on how to resolve the situation. Fire Chief Rick Cary and Code Enforcement Supervisor Lori Mills stated the neighbor has met all of the required codes for the city concerning a wood burning stove. After a lengthy discussion it was determined the City was limited in what action could be taken and this may be a civil action, as all requirements by the City are being followed.

Art Riley, representing the Downtown Merchants Association, wished everyone a Happy New Year. On behalf of the Downtown Merchants, Mr. Riley thanked and complimented the city employees for the promptness in snow removal during the resent bad weather. Mr. Riley asked Community and Economic Development Director Jim Spencer to explain the fifteen-year lien on the Freight Station. Community and Economic Development Director Spencer stated the EDA wants a mechanism should the City decide to sell the property so the grant money will be returned to the EDA. The EDA is investing in the City and this is a part of their terms and condition for the Federal Government when grant funding is involved. Mr. Riley stated he appreciated the corporation between the City and the merchants for Small Business Saturday. He would like more advertising. Community and Economic Development Director Spencer discussed the importance of how merchants need to look at their target customers and the use of social media marketing. Community and Economic Development Director Spencer wants to continue the City and the merchants as being involved in "joint cooperative marketing".

Assistant City Manager Josh Cline discussed approved Policy 2320, adopted by the West Virginia Board of Education (WVBE) that created the new grading system for all West Virginia public schools. During 2014, State of the State Address Governor Earl Ray Tomblin charged the board with adopting a policy that would assign an A through F grade to public schools. Assistant City Manager Cline stated what came out of Policy 2320 is detrimental as a marketing tool for West Virginia. There are many flaws with an A, B, C, D, and F grading scale. One test cannot take into account struggles (drugs, poverty, unemployment, depression, etc.) that are factors in student performance but are not at the level of other schools in the state in more affluent areas. Stereotypes of "good schools" or "bad schools" will be developed and shared on social media. Being a border community, the lack of understanding of the grading scale may influence our area in attracting new residents This policy is based on a bell curve grading scale-comparing schools in the state to each other. The policy does not account for national averages, testing completed in one day, and various other benchmark measures. Students taking the West Test cannot be compared to Virginia students taking the Standard of Learning (SOL) test. Students may take the SOL tests multiple times to pass, while West Test is taken once. The assessment does not take into account many factors that can affect the outcome of score rating. Bluefield High School received an A rating but that is not the full picture. Elementary Schools and Early Learning Centers have no bearing on the grades they receive. These schools do not take the West Test but receive the same grade as the Intermediate School. Superintendents and educators across the state were not in favor of this policy due to the stigma it places on each school without all conditions that affect the educational process. Citizens should not take the grading system at "face value", but learn the facts. A letter is being prepared for the Bluefield Daily Telegraph and citizens are encouraged to learn more and voice their opinion to State Legislators

ACTION ITEMS

Mayor Cole requested **approval of an agreement with Region I Planning and Development Council for Administrative Services.** Director Ellen Light moved to approve an agreement with Region I

Planning and Development Council for Administrative Services; unanimously approved and so ordered.

Mayor Cole requested approval to appoint Kelly Knowles to the Historic Landmarks Commission for a three-year term (January 10, 2017 – January 9, 2020). **Director Chuck McGonagle moved to appoint Kelly Knowles to the Historic Landmarks Commission for a three-year term (January 10, 2017 – January 9, 2020); unanimously approved and so ordered.**

Other

Mayor Cole reminded citizens of the Town Hall Meeting – Annual Review scheduled January 31st at the Bluefield Area Arts Center, 500 Bland Street at 6:00 p.m. The public is welcome and encouraged to attend.

Director Michael Gibson moved to adjourn, unanimously approved and so ordered.

Bobbi Kersey, City Clerk

Thomas J. Cole, Mayor