

**Board of Commissioners**  
**Special Meeting- Budget Workshop Minutes**  
**April 20, 2023**

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Board members present: Mayor Tim Helms  
Mayor Pro Tem Tom Widmer  
Commissioner Jane Alexander  
Commissioner Mason Blake  
Commissioner Kitty Fouche (via telephone)  
Commissioner Kent Otto

Board members absent: None

Town staff present: Jason Burrell, Town Manager  
Angie Murphy, Town Clerk

One member of the public was present at Town Hall.

**Budget Workshop 2023-2024 Fiscal Year Budget**

Town Manager Jason Burrell stated that the idea behind the day's workshop is to hear the Commissioners ideas for the upcoming budget year. Mr. Burrell advised that the next Budget Meeting, which will include Department Heads, will be more of a deep dive into the budget process.

Mr. Burrell stated that health insurance for staff will go up 5%. Mr. Burrell stated that with regards to our current budget revenues are looking good but the question remains of how to generate more revenue. Mr. Burrell stated that at this point he not proposing a tax increase. Mr. Burrell stated that the biggest thing going on is the Texas Road Bridge Project. Mr. Burrell also stated that there is \$83,000 in ARPA money to spend and that it needs be figured out how to spend the monies. Mr. Burrell stated that the \$191,000 from Land-of-Sky could only be used for Phase 1 of the bridge project. Mr. Burrell recently met with the engineers who are looking at different options for the existing abutments. When the project started roughly five years ago it was discussed to patch the abutments but they have digressed to a point where the existing abutments will have to be replaced completely or look at different options. Mr. Burrell would like for the Council to get the options narrowed down to one and go back to Mattern & Craig with a plan. Based on potential costs Mr. Burrell is looking at options of doing a pre-fabricated bridge which would be going outside the existing scope and doing new concrete abutments with the pre-fabricated part sitting above the abutments. Mr. Burrell stated that to get this project complete within the year a decision needs to be made and stuck with until finished. Mayor Helms questioned if a car could cross over the pre-fabricated bridge in the event of an emergency. Mayor Pro Tem Blake stated that had been the Bridge Aesthetics Committees intention to removable bollards to allow for egress. Mr. Burrell stated that if the Town wanted to allow for vehicular traffic he would need to reach out to the DOT and bring up to their standards. Commissioner Widmer advised that there is an email that states that the Town would not receive the \$191,000 if they went with a pre-fabricated bridge. Mr. Burrell does not feel that paying Mattern & Craig \$10,000 for more convoluted options is the way to

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proceed.

Mr. Burrell stated that Public Works Director Barry Creasman would like to entertain the idea of purchasing a new or used backhoe. Mr. Burrell has suggested that Mr. Creasman look into leasing a backhoe. Mr. Burrell feels that there is a need for a backhoe but not enough of a need to purchase one. Mr. Burrell stated that Chief David Arrant had mentioned a new police vehicle. Mr. Burrell advised that there is one police vehicle that is nearing the end of its life as established by the Council. Mr. Burrell plans to provide numbers for leasing and purchasing a new police vehicle. Mr. Burrell stated that these two items were all Mr. Creasman and Chief Arrant had to discuss.

Commissioner Tom Widmer stated that Mr. Creasman had mentioned a new chipper for a number of years. Mr. Burrell stated that was not mentioned but would look at lease options for that as well. Mayor Pro Tem Blake questioned if only one officer is on duty at a time in Montreat why is there a need for four or five police cars. Commissioner Kent Otto advised that the Town of Montreat does not have a take home vehicle policy in place for the police officers so having your own car is kind of a "perk" for the officers. Mr. Burrell stated that shared vehicles led to cars being in service 24 hours a day which leads to higher maintenance costs. Commissioner Otto does not like to see a lot of police cars just sitting around and feels like the Town could stretch the 10 year/100,000 mile life a little further. Mr. Burrell stated he was not going to recommend replacing the police vehicle rather he would suggest amending the replacement calendar policy. Mr. Burrell advised that the Chief has also been looking at body cameras. Commissioner Widmer stated that was budgeted in the current fiscal year to be purchased. Mr. Burrell also mentioned that he hoped to utilize grants as a way of getting things accomplished in the upcoming year. Mr. Burrell says he will work to point Staff in the right direction of what grants are available.

Mr. Burrell mentioned that he would like to get some input on the possibility of raising water rates and rectifying discrepancies in institutional and residential rates. Mr. Burrell advised that there are currently 23 accounts (Montreat College and MRA) that are classified as ¾" lines that are residentially priced. The idea is to look at creating a ¾" institutional rate. Commissioner Tom Widmer stated that the consumption rate of \$4.95 has not been raised since 2011. Commissioner Widmer also advised that the median of the municipalities in Buncombe County is \$5.95 and the average is \$6.25. Mayor Pro Tem Blake stated that the Town needs to price the water on its total cost. Commissioner Widmer stated that the NCRWA is currently in the process of putting together a water rate study for the Town of Montreat. Commissioner Widmer stated that the access fees: \$14.95 for ¾" residential line, \$92.25 for 1" institutional lines and \$225.50 for 2" institutional lines were established in 2012 and have not been adjusted since. There is also a 6" line for Montreat College that is being charged the 2" line rates. Commissioner Widmer and Mr. Burrell are looking at several different scenarios to recommend to cover the cost of running a water enterprise. Commissioner Widmer advised that it takes money to improve infrastructure. Mr. Burrell advised that if the Town of Montreat were to apply for water grants that the Town needs to do their due diligence to be comparable with other water rates.

Mayor Pro Tem Blake mentioned that he had received a few complaints lately about the sound system in the meeting room being inadequate. Commissioner Widmer stated that the microphone system is not as sensitive as other systems. Commissioner Widmer stated that the AV Technician

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had looked into new equipment but he was not sure about the progress at this point.

Mr. Burrell advised that the priority projects should be the Texas Road Bridge, lining the culverts and the Texas Wall Project. Mr. Burrell mentioned that he, Commissioner Widmer and Mayor Pro Tem Blake met with Mary Weber about the possibility of a park area at the Texas Road Bridge but Mr. Burrell considers that lower in priority. Mr. Burrell mentioned that Mr. Creasman had a number of water meters that need to be replaced as well. Commissioner Widmer questioned if Mr. Creasman had purchased the budgeted generator yet. Mr. Burrell stated that he was looking into prices of other generators so hopefully the cost will decrease. Commissioner Widmer stated that all ARPA funds need to be encumbered by 2024 so it is important to decide what the Commission wants to do with the remaining amount. Mr. Burrell mentioned that the Town should consider building the Powell Bill account back up for a period of time. Mr. Burrell also mentioned that there are a lot of different uses for Powell Bill money other than just strictly paving.

Mayor Helms advised Mr. Burrell that Chief Arrant and Mr. Creasman would need help with grants as they are not in the grant gathering mode. Mayor Helms felt that Mr. Burrell should be spearheading the grant search because Mr. Creasman is out in the field the majority of the day. Commissioner Widmer stated that newly elected President of the Democratic Party of Buncombe County, Ed Kramer, was chagrined to find out that the Town of Montreat had never received any monies for projects from Buncombe County. Mr. Kramer went to Buncombe County Commissioner Al Whitesides and asked how many municipalities had received money from Buncombe County. The answer was every single municipality but Montreat.

Commissioner Widmer stated that the website needs to be updated. Commissioner Widmer stated that while Town Clerk Angie Murphy has the ability to update the website she does not have the time. Commissioner Widmer suggested finding an intern from a nearby college to suggest changes to and then turn them loose to rewrite, update and possibly make the changes. Commissioner Widmer thinks that all this could be accomplished for around \$3,000.

Commissioner Widmer asked Mr. Burrell if the Commission had given him adequate information to report to Mattern & Craig about the Texas Road Bridge Project. Mr. Burrell asked everyone if they were amenable to a prefabricated bridge. Mr. Burrell went on to explain that the platform itself would be prefabricated. Commissioner Otto questioned whether they would be able to get a prefabricated platform around the Gate and up to Texas Road. Mayor Helms stated that the bridge has changed so much and he wants to be on the same page with the plan. Commissioner Otto reminded everyone that if a prefabricated bridge is chosen that the Town loses the \$197,000 from Land-of-Sky Regional Council.

Commissioner Fouche expressed concerns about raising the water rates on certain MRA owned properties like the water fountain at Welch Field and suggested setting a usage limit that they would pay if they went higher than the limit. Commissioner Fouche also stated that she didn't think they should worry about spending the extra money until they know what is going on with the MRA Lodge lawsuit. Mayor Helms mentioned that he asked Mr. Burrell to call the attorneys to see if they could tell us potential costs if the lawsuit continued in the courts.

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Mayor Helms stated that the only thing that doesn't look like Montreat is the NCDOT metal guardrail on Lookout. Mayor Helms also had concerns about the railings on Shenandoah Terrace as well. Commissioner Widmer stated that he had talked to Mr. Creasman about the guardrail on Lookout and there is a plan in place but there is no money to fund the plan.

Commissioner Widmer asked if the new Comprehensive Plan, that is currently being drafted, will have suggestions for the Town inside. Mayor Helms gave a brief explanation of the draft plan and stated the Steering Committee would be meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup> to hopefully finalize everything. The plan would then go before Planning & Zoning before reaching the Board of Commissioners for adoption. Commissioner Widmer asked Mayor Helms if there was going to be anything on the plan that needed to be addressed in the next fiscal year budget to which the Mayor stated there was not. Mayor Helms briefly discussed stormwater issues that the Town faces.

Mr. Burrell met with representatives from Montreat College and Black Mountain Police and Fire and they are in the process of establishing an Emergency Preparedness Plan.

Commissioner Fouche questioned if golf carts were legal in Montreat and if not the Council needs to make them legal. Mayor Helms stated that former Police Chief Jack Staggs advised him that they were legal if they were road-worthy. Mr. Burrell stated that he would look into that topic for Commissioner Fouche.

Commissioner Widmer advised that there would soon be a Master Plan made public from the College and while most work would be in Black Mountain there has been mention of two or three new buildings in Montreat. Commissioner Widmer stated that if one looks at Yale Road, which leads to the baseball diamond, part of that road is owned by the Town of Montreat. Commissioner Widmer has spoken briefly with Zoning Administrator Kayla DiCristina who is unsure whether the Town or the College would be responsible for widening the Town's portion of Yale Road. There is also a question of who owns the old road which passes right in the middle of the baseball field.

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Tim Helms , Mayor

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Angie Murphy, Town Clerk

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