**Town of Lake Santeetlah**

**Council Meeting Minutes**

**September 8, 2022**

Mayor Connie Gross called the meeting to order at 5:30PM. Councilmembers Tina Emerson and Ralph Mitchell were present for the meeting. Town Administrator Kim Matheson, Town Clerk Emily Hooper, and Town Technician Scott Kamps were also present. Attorney Derek Allen was available by Zoom. Diana Simon and Jim Hager were not present.

Scott Kamps presented the Innovation. Ralph Mitchell presented the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Approval of the Agenda:** Councilmember Mitchell made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Emerson seconded. All approved. The motion passed unanimously.

**Approval of the August 11, 2022 Council Meeting Minutes:** Councilmember Emerson made a motion to approve the August 11, 2022 Council Meeting minutes as presented. Mitchell seconded. All approved. The motion unanimously.

**Financial/Tax Report:** The tax collection for August was $18,352.97. Matheson stated there were two line items over in the budget for the month of August. Dues and Subscriptions needs $220 and Payroll fees, $1000. Matheson will move these funds to cover the overage. When preparing the budget it was expected that the Town would move to the new software (Edmunds) earlier and would not need to budget for Heartland Payroll fees.

Emerson reported that the roof for Town Hall has been completed and the initial deposit for Edmunds financial software was been paid in August. The Scadata will be installed and paid in September.

Chris Ferris, North Carolina Certified General Appraiser, has been working with Brandy Cook, Tax Assessor, to complete the Graham County property reevaluations. The reevaluation started by auditing the tax maps and comparing to the office computer system and many “mismatches” were discovered. Ferris and Cook then begin to “clean-up” the GIS maps. The County was re-delineated into a market neighborhood. Ferris presented a map to show the townships, sub neighborhoods and subdivisions broken down throughout the County. This helps to study the market and compare similar land values. Ferris explained in the process of reevaluation all homes were re-measured. In doing this it was discovered that there were a lot of things not currently listed on the tax records. All records were updated and then the home was evaluated. In Lake Santeetlah specifics that were considered: similar vacant lots and how much they recently sold for, who has the better view, whether the home is on a point or at the top of the mountain, quality of home, type of materials, year built. Ferris spoke with licensed contractors in the area to determine the average cost to build. After this information was gathered the value for the home is set. The County has a new tool known as a pictometry, which has the ability to locate and measure items on the property (as small as a fire hydrant) from the office. This will help with reevaluations in the future. There were 64 homes sold within Lake Santeetlah from 2019 to 2022 (18 per year). Those sales are studied and compared to the homes that have not sold. The evaluations are approximately 80% complete in the field and 40% complete with book work and pricing. Ferris hopes that by mid –February the process will be complete and tax cards will be mailed. There are certain exclusions for the elderly and disabled veterans. Ferris stated that those interested in an application for assistance could pick those up at the tax office.

After the notices are mailed the appeal process begins. This is approximately a two month period. The appeals are reviewed and corrected if needed. Once the appeal process is over the County Commissioners then have the final number of what the value of the County is. The new tax rate is set by the Commissioners.

Mayor Gross asked Ferris if he could provide an idea of how much the appraisals are expected to change. Ferris estimated a 40-50% increase for the 2023 year. Ferris stressed, “This is an estimate.” The vacant land has increased the most, according to Ferris. The last evaluation in 2019 did not include re-measurements and pictures which allowed for slight to no increase. The lack of updating in 2019 and the current market is the main factors for the large increase.

Gross asked if the rentals within the Town effect the appraisal rate. Ferris said, that each rental has been coded so they can be tracked and studied for the future. Currently it did not affect or change the price.

Jose Rosado asked the procedure for appeals. Ferris confirmed, the notices should be sent in late January and mid-February, the appeal process begins (30 days). Formal appeals that cannot be settled by the tax office staff would go to the commissioners or the Board of DNR. Once the board of DNR is adjourned for the year appeals are no longer taken. Ferris suggests if you have an appeal be sure to get it in within 30 days to be certain there is adequate time to review.

Tina Emerson asked if land was valued by linear lake footage. Ferris stated the lake footage was considered, but they were lot priced.

If you appeal the reevaluation you must have supporting data to help prove your claim. An appraisal prior to January 1, 2023 will not be considered.

**Request for Public Comment:**

Julie Claveria lives at 17 Cheoah Trail which is located at the top of the mountain. The water at the homes in this location goes out every time the power goes out. There are 7 homes that are affected. The tank is not stationed higher than these homes and there is no gravity pressure to send water to the homes when the power goes out. This often happens during the winter months when it is difficult to get down the mountain to buy water. If the power goes out for a long period of time it would effect more than the 7 homes. Claveria asked the Council to consider purchasing a pump with a battery backup or a generator with multiple power sources to help solve this issue. Claveria stated, the first year they lived at Lake Santeetlah there were 12 times the power went out and it’s very frustrating. Claveria referred to the rules to running public water systems and stated that auxiliary power to guarantee that water is delivered in a consist pattern.

Scott Kamps explained that the Town is working on the best scenario for this problem. What size generator is needed to operate the pumps? Kamps stated that during the research one thing has led to another. There is a fire hydrant in the area that would have to be supplied by the pump. The size of the lines must be considered. Scott Sawyer, electrician, is assisting Kamps with his recommendations for the most economical solution. Kamps explained that typically the Town goes through 5000 gallons each week in the winter. In the peak summer time, 30,000 gallons each week. If the power went out it would take quite a while to empty the 130,000 gallon tanks. The Town currently has a gas generator that could manually run the pumps to supply water if necessary. Kamps stressed that trying to make the right decision is simply taking time, but there is a desire and a plan to find a solution.

Alan Davidson asked for clarification, for why the homes at the top of the mountain lose water so quickly. Kamps explained that the pump that supplies the pressure to the pipes for those homes requires electricity.

Jack Gross provided history of the water system, what was not installed properly and what is needed to improve. The homes at the top of the mountain are being supplied by a one inch line that leads into three inch lines going into the homes.

Kevin Haag understands the upgrades recently completed in the water system were expensive leaving little funds for other things but asked the Council to keep “their feet to the fire” and focus on the infrastructure of the Town.

Emerson explained the long term plan that was created to complete upgrades throughout the Town. Unfortunately, there are a lot of issues with the water that needs resolved, yet little funds to do so. Emerson explained that the Council has not forgotten about this problem and is working on options.

Kevin Haag asked about the extra tank that seems to sit higher. Kamps stated that it appears higher but it isn’t. It is within 6 inches of the other tank.

**Old Business:**

1. **Report on lease of Graham County’s tool for water line identification:** Mayor Gross provided background information of the identification tool. A company came and provided a demonstration of how the tool would assist in locating all the water lines within the Town. The Town of Robbinsville has this specific equipment. Mayor Gross and Kamps attended the Town Hall meeting and presented a proposal for renting the tool for $250 per week. Robbinsville would prefer for the employee who runs the machine to assist Kamps during the use of the tool. The Town of Robbinsville is open to renting the equipment and will look into liability and salary cost and report back. Attorney Allen is aware of the potential rent/lease and will write a legal agreement that can be signed by all parties. Kamps hopes that by the end of this winter all pipes are mapped.
2. **Scadata Installation:**  Kamps reported the purpose of the scadata. The scadata communicates the pumps to the tanks. The old system went out during a storm around July 4th. During this time Kamps and other staff has been turning the pumps on manually. The programmer should be here Monday to complete installation. The new scadata is basically the same as the old. The only upgrade to this system includes boxes at both sites. The Town of Robbinsville just had a high quality scadata installed. An employee from Robbinsville is planning to show Kamp the capabilities of the new system and then the Town can decide if any of those upgrades would be beneficial to Lake Santeetlah. Anything added could be done to the new system we are currently having installed, we would not need a new scadata.

**New Business:**

1. **Interlocal Agreement Renewal – Nantahala Regional Library/Derek Allen (action needed):** Mayor Grossprovided the detail of the interlocal agreement (three counties, four libraries included). This agreement is a ten year agreement that Lake Santeetlah has been involved in years ago but withdrew due to a concern at the Graham County Library. Gross reviewed the concerns of participating in the agreement. The funds donated by the Town of Santeetlah will remain in Graham County. The $1200 donation from the Town will be used to keep the library open on Mondays for four hours. Gross is on the Nantahala Regional Library Board and is uncertain if she should recuse herself from a vote. Attorney Allen explained that a vote is required by the other board members if Gross should be recused due to conflict. Emerson made a motion not to recuse Mayor Gross from the vote on the interlocal agreement. Mitchell seconded. All approved. Emerson made a motion to approve the interlocal agreement as presented and donate $1200 from the Town. Gross seconded. All approved. The motion carried.
2. **Change meeting date – from November 17th to November 10th (action needed):** Mayor Gross explained that Veterans Day was on Friday this year so there would be no need to delay the meeting to November 17th. Emerson made a motion to change the meeting date to November 10th at 5:30PM. Mitchell seconded. All approved. The motion passed unanimously.
3. **Lakeside Drainage Request/Solution (action needed):** Matheson explained that $2,100 was left in escrow when Lakeside roads were turnover. It has been requested by the developer that the remaining funds be used to reimburse the contractor for the repair of the drainage issue. Emerson made a motion to reimburse the $2,100. Gross seconded. All approved. The motion passed unanimously. Rosado will follow up with who the payment should be sent to.
4. **Water Bill Payments Past Due Concern:** The last two billing quarters there has been an increase in past due payments. Gross explained that the updated software will allow residents to log on and pay the bill. Emerson suggested that the due date be shortened to 30 days instead of 45. The extended time frame could cause people to forget and not pay. Matheson pointed out if the water policy was enforced and water turned off when payment was late it would also help residents to know they must pay by the due date. Emerson explained that the policy needs updated prior to enforcing to make it clear. Gross asked for the updated policy to be on the agenda next month.
5. **TDA Update – Diana Simon:** was not available to provide a report.
6. **TPOA Update – Betty LoBue:** LoBue was not available for a report. Kevin Haag provided a brief update concerning nominations for officers. Emerson pointed out that in the newsletter if you were on the Council you cannot be nominated for a board. Emerson asked Kevin Haag to report to the TPOA Board that the Council cannot be prohibited.

**Discussion:**

1. **Graham County 150 year celebration – pictures/comments:** Gross thanked those involved with the booth in any way. It was a great way to represent the Town of Santeetlah.
2. **Lake Clean-up hosted by Randall Veal – September 24th:** Randall Veal is organizing a clean-up event for Lake Santeetlah on Saturday September 24th. An email with further detail was attached to the meeting documents. Help can be by donations, volunteer support, or by bringing a boat to help gather trash. If interested contact Randall at the Marina for more details.
3. **New Directories available at Town Hall:** The updated 2022-23 directories are complete and available for pick up at Town Hall.
4. **Carry over of Vacation Time or Comp Time for Employees:** Mayor Gross pointed out that Kamps has a lot of Comp time that has built up when he comes out after hours and stays late. The town currently does not have a policy for comp time. The Council discussed allowing Kamps to turn 40 hours of comp time over to vacation time. The attorneys will review the personnel policy and update. The updated policy will be presented in October.

**Request for Public Comment:**

There were no request at this time.

* The next regular scheduled Council Meeting will be held October 13, 2022 at 5:30PM. This meeting will be held at Town Hall and by Zoom.

**Motion to Adjourn.**

Councilmember Mitchell made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Emerson seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 7:23PM.

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Connie Gross, Mayor Emily Hooper, Town Clerk