

BUDGET WORK SESSION
Town of Sylva Board of Commissioners
January 25, 2024

The Town of Sylva Board of Commissioners held a budget work session on January 25, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. hosted in the Board Room of Municipal Hall, 83 Allen Street, Sylva, N.C. and held electronically by Zoom meeting.

PRESENT: Mary Gelbaugh, Mayor Pro-Tem
Blitz Estridge, Commissioner
Mark Jones, Commissioner
Natalie Newman, Commissioner
Johnny Phillips, Mayor
Brad Waldrop, Commissioner

Richard Hicks, Interim Town Manager
Amanda Murajda, Town Clerk

ABSENT:

Mayor Phillips called the budget work session to order at 12:00 p.m. following the regular board meeting.

STAFF PRESENT: Lynn Bryant (Finance Officer), Jake Scott (Public Works Director), Bernadette Peters (Mainstreet Director), Mike Beck (Fire Chief) and Keith Buchanan (Assistant Fire Chief) Robbie Carter (Police Lieutenant) and Chris Hatton (Police Chief).

VISITORS: None.

Interim Manager Hicks reviewed the budget schedule for the upcoming months as well as the Town's assets, vision and mission. Individual department heads reviewed their respective department's duties and services.

DISCUSSION:

Lynn Bryant, Finance Officer, reviewed the Town's Financial Report as of 12/31/23. She noted areas of interest on the financial report presented to the board. Bryant reviewed the Town's investment accounts and explained the quarterly finance report. She also reviewed the general capital reserve funds for equipment, the Fisher Creek Analysis, state revenues, fund balance and the Revolving Loan Fund.

Bryant discussed current predictions from financial analysts. Sales tax revenue, currently at a high rate, and other categories of revenue are difficult to predict. The Town will need to be cautious in planning for future expenditures.

Amanda Murajda, Tax Collector, reported that the 2022-2023 tax collection rate was 97.66%. To date, the collection rate for the 2023 taxes was 91.29%. Murajda advised the board that tax collections are directly affected by the economy. As the town prepares for the Highway 107 project, tax revenue could be affected.

Budget Review:

Accomplishments 2023-2024 Budget

- Completion of Allen Street slope failure
- Bids awarded and construction started on Depot Bathroom Project
- Bids awarded and construction started on Bridge Park Green Infrastructure Project
- Contract awarded for Pinnacle Park Master Plan
- Skate ramp was completed and opened to the public
- Employee wellness fair was held
- Funding source allowed Police Department Community Care Liaison to be full-time for 3 years
- Successful transition to Paid/Volunteer Fire Department
- FY 22/23 Audit was unqualified with no findings
- Town's website was updated and activated
- Exterior of Town Hall was painted
- Skyland Drive sidewalk project underway

Budget Priorities 2023-2024 Budget

1. Full-time Mainstreet Director
2. Crosswalk flashing signs
3. Communication platform between Board and community
4. Prioritize a significant COLA
5. Master Plan—Pinnacle Park
6. Entry sign coming in to Town from Dillsboro
7. Landis Street ramp to sidewalk (will require ADA study)
8. Pedestrian Plan
9. Murals on Mill--\$3,000
10. Upgrades/beautification of closed land on Spring Street
11. Tree removal/replacement at Ritz lot
12. “Sylva” sculpture—letters spelled out--\$30,000
13. Poteet Bathrooms--\$95,000
14. Depot bathroom/landscaping/site work
15. Redo zoning map--\$40,000
16. Ongoing: Pay Plan Implementation

OPEB Concerns—Items reviewed by the Interim Manager:

- Retiree medical insurance
- Separation allowance
- Aging workforce
- Increasing costs of medical insurance for current employees

Project Review:

Allen Street Slope Repair

Approved Budget Ordinance: \$2,314,147

Expenditures & Encumbrances:

- To Date: \$1,783,198
- Wurster Construction Contract: \$1,426,268
- This slope stabilization is the largest and most expensive in the town’s history
- Funding sources:
 - NCDOT Contingency Funds
 - General fund: Fund Balance

Bryson Park Playground Equipment & Capital Improvements

Approved budget ordinance--\$3,000,000

Funding Source: State Capital & Infrastructure Grant Fund (SCIF)

Expenditures & Encumbrances:

- To date--\$2,151,232
- Wurster Construction Contract--\$1,997,915

Downtown Public Restroom

Approved budget ordinance--\$614,649

Funding Sources:

- State Capital & Infrastructure Grant Fund (SCIF): \$390,000
- ARPA Related Funds: \$215,749
- Interest: \$8,900

Expenditures & Encumbrances:

- To Date: \$561,137
- Cinderella Partners Construction Contract: \$507,422

Bridge Park Stormwater Project

Approved Budget Ordinance: \$893,704

Funding Sources:

- ARPA Related Funds: \$516,447

- Jackson County TDA: \$367,757
 - Interest: \$9,500
- Expenditures & Encumbrances:
- To Date: \$816,860
 - Buchanan & Sons, Inc. Contract: \$749,360

Additional Budget Issues

1. R5600/NC107 Sidewalks
 - a. \$200,000 Committed
 - b. \$100,000 budgeted in FY 2018-2019
 - c. \$50,000 budgeted in FY 2019-2020
 - d. \$20,000 budgeted in FY 2021-2022
 - e. \$30,000 budgeted in FY 2022-2023

2. Skyland Drive Sidewalk
 - a. Total town portion of project is \$384,406
 - b. Town funds expended on engineering & right-of-way: \$114,974
 - c. Town funds committed to construction: \$269,432
 - d. Anticipated completion: Late March 2024

Department Needs

Public Works:

- Equipment Trailer--\$7,000
- Air compressor--\$3,000
- Computer (Director)--\$2,500

Police

- Maintain vehicle replacement schedule of 2 vehicles
- Firearms Upgrade--\$6,500
- PD Computer Server Replacement--\$8,000

Fire Department

- Building Heat--\$100,000
- Pumper Truck--\$700,000

Department Wants

Public Works

- Upgraded tire machine--\$8,500
- Upgraded welder--\$5,000

Fire Department

- Repaint 2nd Floor of station
- Replace carpet on 2nd Floor of station

Board:

- Update bathrooms at Poteet Park/Completely Renovate and Upgrade Poteet Park
- Improve Mill Street (Streetscapes, new lighting, underground utilities, improve building facades, façade grants, technical assistance, move HVAC units to rooftop, public/private partnerships)
- Review of sidewalk requirements for new business/change of occupancy. Are we business friendly?
- Develop closer relationships with other community leaders (Jackson County, Western Carolina, Southwestern Community College, Town of Dillsboro). Joint meetings. Improve community engagement.
- Continue to assist with business relocation and development on Hwy. 107 project. Make sure citizens are informed and traffic safety is a priority. Recruit retail and restaurants. Recruit major grocery store.
- Develop partnership to bring a passenger train to Sylva for tourism, small business growth and food trucks.
- Develop Housing Master Plan to address the need for affordable housing and/or workforce housing.

- Upgrade crosswalks in central business district (flashing lights, in-pavement markings, LED lights, advance caution signs, speed humps, improved pavement markings, curb extensions, crosswalk flags)
- Joint discussion between Town and County on development of pump track/skatepark at Mark Watson Park or other publicly owned land.
- Dress up Sylva for all seasons (such as Fall, Western Carolina, Smoky Mountain High School). Decorative lighting and banners for downtown utility poles.

ADJOURNMENT: *Commissioner Newman made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:27 p m. The motion carries with a unanimous vote.*

Johnny Phillips
Mayor

Amanda Murajda
Town Clerk