

Minutes of the continued meeting of March 8, 2022 of the Saltville Town Council held on March 29, 2022 at 7:00 p.m. in the Town Hall

Council: **Monica Johnson, Jeff Comer, Eugene Call, Bryan Morris, and Gary Call
Steve Surber was absent**

Mayor: **C. Todd Young**

Staff: **Brian Martin, Town Manager
Erik Puckett, Police Chief
Steve Johnson, Clerk/Treasurer**

Councilman Eugene Call made a motion to add tonight’s topic, Blue Line Solutions, to the agenda, and Councilwoman Johnson seconded. The motion carried 4-0-1 with Councilman Morris abstaining.

New Business

1. Blue Line Solutions

The representative for Blue Line Solutions said that the General Assembly passed legislation in 2020 that allowed for each locality in the state to pass a local ordinance which would allow photo speed enforcement in school zones and work zones. Many towns in the state have already enacted this ordinance, and each locality can set their own civil fine of up to \$100. This particular offense will not alter the points on anyone’s license. Finally, if approved, this would be overseen by the police department. Blue Line is owned by Mark Hutchinson who has decades of police experience. His goal is to eliminate deaths in school zones.

There was a meeting last December 15th with all Police Chiefs in the county, including Sheriff Shuler, at the Chilhowie Town Hall. Chief Puckett showed interest in the project, and that’s when the ball started rolling for Saltville. The first step was conducting a speed study at the elementary school on East Main Street. This study was conducted over five days on Highway 91 in front of the elementary school, and in that time period, 8586 cars passed that way and a total of 792 violations were recognized. The hours documented were from 7:30 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. each of those five days since those are the school hours.

The Council was given a copy of the ordinance that was just adopted by Wythe County to use as a template. The town’s attorney can then use this copy to create an ordinance for Saltville if the

Council approves to do this by catering the language to fit the town's needs. Blue Line will then start the paperwork process.

In addition to providing the service of the photo enforcement, this would also supply free ALPR (Automated License Plate Recognition) for the school. This captures images of every single vehicle that goes through the school zone 24/7. These images tie back into a platform available to the police that they can tap into in real time in case there is ever a school shooting or abduction. The ALPR and the speed device would both be free-of-charge to the town. This data would be available as long as the town has the contract.

If the town agrees to use this program and signs a contract, Blue Line will then engage in very, very thorough public information and education. The goal is to make people aware that this will not be like the cameras that used to be in the Piney Flats area before you get to Johnson City. That was strictly a revenue-generating device. Blue Line's sole purpose is to provide safety in the elementary school zone. They will partner with the school system and the locality to notify everyone of what is about to happen. Where 792 violations were observed during the speed study, the goal would be to have that number fall to 200 before this is implemented, and the public and school notifications will help this. After thirty to forty-five days of public notice, there would be a warning phase that lasts thirty days before the program goes live. Moreover, if there is any type of mechanical breakdown with any equipment, Blue Line will replace it and not charge the town or the school system. The afore-mentioned Wythe County program is scheduled to go live in May.

Another good aspect to this program is that all localities in the area that use it can tie into every other locality in terms of viewing their ALPRs. For example, if there is a drug investigation in several different locations, each of those locations can look at all of the others to help in their individual efforts by looking for specific vehicle makes or license plate numbers. Same goes with child abductions or other situations. Safety is the main priority of the program, and the Council can structure their fines however they want as long as they stay within the constraints set by the state. If the town sets a fine of \$100, then the town will actually receive \$85, and Blue Line will receive \$15. Once the ball starts rolling, Blue Line's permitting department collaborates with the school system and VDOT's local administrative and engineering departments to make sure everything is as it should be in terms of signage, etc. since the school zone is on a VDOT road.

The bottom line is that the Council can adopt an ordinance to enforce school zone speeding via photo enforcement as long as school is in session and kids are on the property. After some Council questions to clarify everything from work zones to tiered fines to submitting a separate RFP for these services, to how and when the town would be invoiced, to how to handle it if school lets out early and people would not be charged for a violation like they normally would, and how the town's computers would be set up to participate in the program, Councilwoman Johnson made a motion to send the paperwork to the town's attorney for his review, and Councilman Morris seconded. All were in favor.

Lastly, Councilman Eugene Call made the motion to adjourn, and Councilman Morris seconded. All were in favor.