

Minutes of the budget meeting of the Saltville Town Council held on July 12, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. in the Town Hall

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

Mayor: C. Todd Young

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

Town Manager Brian Martin told the Council that he and Clerk/Treasurer Steve Johnson met with Councilman Comer and all three went over a few options regarding a proposed budget for 2022. The Council currently has copies of the draft budget that was put together. Councilman Comer thanked Councilwoman Johnson and Councilman Morris for the previous draft budget they had requested be put together that took into effect the new minimum wage laws that will soon be enacted. This current budget is based on the same principle. He said he presented to Mr. Martin and Mr. Johnson the idea of not funding the additional police officer since that would free up almost \$70,000. He then asked Chief Puckett his thoughts.

Chief Puckett replied that he was okay with losing one of the positions in his department and would make one of the seven remaining the inmate supervisor. Mr. Johnson said this current proposed budget contains seven officers which freed up the aforementioned approximate \$70,000. This budget also does not contain the tax increase the previous one did; however, it does still contain the 4.55% raise in water rates and the 5.13% raise in sewer rates. Councilwoman Johnson asked about employee raises, and Mr. Johnson replied that the raise was 5% except in the case of some of the maintenance employees where it was a little more. This was due to the fact that they had to be raised a little more to account for those new required minimum wage rates. Those rates will be Tony Stevenson and Greg Armstrong making \$12.00/hour and Jim Wyatt making \$11.00/hour with the two new hires each making \$11.00/hour.

Councilman Comer then mentioned that the minimum rate that has to be in effect in January of 2026 is \$13.00/hour, so the vast majority of the town's employees will already be at that threshold. It will then be easier to bump those up not making that \$13.00/hour since they are already close. The employee raises will show the employees that the Council is thinking of them and really makes the police department salaries more competitive with other agencies which, hopefully, means that Chief Puckett won't lose officers to these other agencies. Additionally, the proposed salary structure is pretty much set until 2026. The one possible downside to this is that once a salary structure is created, it cannot really go back, so if revenues decrease, then bigger cuts have to be made. No one knows what the future holds. Councilwoman Johnson then stated that the part-time workers will still have to be bumped up

as well, so that should be taken into effect too. Mr. Johnson then said that this budget additionally increased the salaries of the pool workers, but the part-time worker currently in the front office may not be here this coming January when the newest rates become effective. Councilwoman Johnson then said she wished this in-depth conversation about salaries could have happened before, since if it had, this budget could have already been finalized.

Mr. Johnson told the Council to look at line item 215, the Special Events Committee (Labor Day). This was inadvertently left off of the first draft budget but was put into this one. Even with this late edition, this current proposed budget is in the black by almost \$24,000. Councilwoman Johnson then asked if the Gasoline line item was bumped up due to the added vehicles from the Rescue Squad, and Mr. Johnson said it was.

Councilwoman Johnson asked if Officer Henderson was included in this budget, and Mr. Johnson said she was listed as one of the new hires in the breakdown sheet he had given the Council. Councilman Gary Call asked about the starting salaries for the officers, and Chief Puckett said that they all come in at the same rate. Even the two officers who have been here the longest, Officer Hogston and Officer Bordwine, still make that same rate. Councilman Morris then stated that he would like to see those two officers making more than the new hires currently do and suggested \$1000 more. The Mayor then asked each Council member if they would like to see those two officers make a little more, and they all agreed. Councilwoman Johnson added to that by stating she would like to see any new hires make the current \$28,000 unless they are certified. If they are certified, they would start at \$29,400. Because Officer Hogston has been with the department around two years longer, The Mayor suggested bumping him up an extra \$1200 while Officer Bordwine would get an extra \$1000.

Regarding the maintenance department, Councilman Morris said he would like to see Mr. Stevenson make a little more since he's been here the longest and is probably the best worker. Mr. Martin said it sounds like the Council might want to take a merit approach to raises in the future. After some more discussion, the Council agreed to have Mr. Stevenson make 13.00/hour, and Mr. Armstrong and Mr. Wyatt make \$12.00/hour. Councilman Comer then brought up the fact that all full-time employees will make at least the \$12.00/hour which puts the town ahead of the curve concerning the minimum wage requirements.

Councilwoman Johnson asked why the town has never paid the Fire Chief, and the Mayor said it was a volunteer organization. It's also not currently an issue. Councilman Morris then mentioned that Saltville is the only volunteer department in the area. Marion's and Chilhowie's fire department is combined with their EMS departments, so that's why they are paid.

Councilman Gary Call made a motion to accept the changes discussed tonight, and Councilman Surber seconded. All were in favor.

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

