



Town Council Workshop Minutes

The Town Council regularly scheduled workshop was held on Monday, May 11, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. in the Town Council Chambers at Town Hall, 30 S. Main Street, Weaverville, N.C.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Gary D. Lawrence called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Town Council Present: Gary D. Lawrence, John Chase, Jennifer Young, Phil Barnett, Mark Endries, and Andrew Nagle. Absent: Peter McGuire

Staff Present- Town Manager Scottie Harris, Assistant Town Manager Jennifer Jackson, Finance Director Tonya Dozier, Planning Director James Eller, Public Works Director Angela Reece, Assistant Public Works Director Eric Cutshall, Water Treatment Plant Superintendent Randall Wilson, Town Clerk Tamara Mercer, Planner Graham Crawford, Police Chief Somer Oberlin, Fire Chief Ray Canafax, Community Center Manager Mike DeSerio, and A/V Coordinator Lauren Ward.

2. FY:2026-2027 Proposed Budget Workshop #3

A. Sales Tax

Town Manager Harris provided a review and summary of Buncombe County's sales tax and distribution method, noting that the local option sales tax rate is 2.25% and distributed to municipalities on an ad valorem basis. He reviewed Weaverville's distribution rates from 2020 through 2025.

B. Property Tax and Local Government Limitations

Manager Harris stated there are challenging issues regarding Senate Bill 889 which passed the Senate. If adopted, the Town cannot use the 2026 reappraised values but must use previous values to establish property tax revenues. Since we do not know the outcome of this pending legislation, Mr. Harris noted we might have to propose an alternate budget that reverts to the property tax values from 2021 that were in place before the latest revaluation. Property tax rate prior to the 2026 reappraisal was \$0.38. Tax rate options were reviewed, and staff will adjust the rate depending on the outcome of the legislation.

C. Professional Services Overview

An overview of departmental professional services and costs were listed for administration, governing body, police and fire departments as well as public works and water services. The various contracted services include: IT contracts and software licensing, drug screenings, employee assistance network, pay study, codification, audit, actuary, legal, NCLM (North Carolina League of Municipalities), CodeRed, Diligent, facility rental software, GIS system, security, copier services, and engineering services.

There was brief discussion on the cost share and budget requirements for PSIP and CDE for our police and fire departments.

D. Countywide Fire District and Fire Fund Budget

Harris noted that the County Manager's presentation included the countywide fire tax, although Buncombe County tax rate is still not set. The rate and budget could increase in order to address

recruitment and retention. The County has indicated a willingness to add an additional \$100,000 to the fire budget and contribute their share towards recruitable wages. The adjusted Fire Fund budget is proposed at \$5.1M. There was further review of the timeline, re-valuations and adjustments, call volume costs, the cost sharing formula between towns, and the new funding model.

There was an in-depth discussion regarding recruitable Firefighter starting wages including overtime with comparisons of compensation levels at benchmark competitors. Manager Harris added that pay parity with the Police Department is important, as well as increasing the living wage across all departments. There was general consensus from Town Council to address recruitment and retention by increasing both the Fire and Police Department entry level salaries.

E. Recruitment and Retention

Manager Harris reviewed the following recommendations related to recruitment and retention:

- Competitive and Recruitable Salaries
- Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) = proposed 3%
- Retention (Holiday) Bonuses: Increase to \$300 for probationary employees and \$1,000 for all other fulltime employees
- Proposed Policy Amendments: 2% automatic contribution to 401(k) and continue match of up to 6%; Increasing Parental Leave from 2 to 4 weeks paid; Increase minimum annual leave from 2 weeks to 3 weeks

Manager Harris also reviewed the listed employment policy suggestions to retain and recruit employees into the workforce. In response to Councilmember Nagle's question regarding the Town's matching 401K contributions, an employee is vested in the program from the beginning.

F. Overview of General Fund and Fire Fund Capital Request

On overview of the General Fund Capital Requests were reviewed:

- Police Capital Improvements: \$66,627 security upgrades; roof on range building
- Police Capital Equipment: \$49,505 drone bundle, barriers, speed alert trailer
- Fire Capital Equipment: \$95,000 (3) rescue equipment items
- Streets Capital Equipment: \$24,165 (2) message boards
- Stormwater Management Capital Improvement: \$30,000 misc. projects
- Grounds Maintenance Capital Improvement: \$83,000 playground equipment + waterwheel improvements
- New Debt Service: Police Dept. and Public Works Dept. \$139,200 vehicles + swaploader
- Debt Service Fire Dept. Loan Payment for fire trucks \$183,280

TOTAL: \$670,777

G. Fund Balance Information

Finance Director Dozier provided fund balance details and history from 2018 to present. She reviewed the process of how fund balance is increased/decreased at the end of each fiscal year, as well as how re-appropriations are handled to carry funds forward to the next year. She noted that in 2021, \$4M was used to build the Community Center, and explained additional use of fund balance during the year for unforeseen projects, such as the Fire Department sink hole repair.

Director Dozier said that the Fund Balance benchmark for Town's our size is between 20-25%. There was general consensus to keep the Town's target of 40% but it was pointed out that the FY26 audit could show an amount below 40% but still higher than the 20% minimum.

There was a brief discussion regarding FEMA funding, claims, staff time, and resources used during Hurricane Helene. Councilmember Nagle reiterated that savings account monies be used for emergency purposes only, not for operating expenses.

A recap of Town Manager recommended changes and alternate funding models for the general fund expenditures were provided. Manager Harris stated the Town is researching IT contract estimates and meeting with IT vendors and contractors.

3. Town Council Questions, Discussion and Direction

In response to Councilmember Endries' question, Harris said that for other towns in our region, their recommended tax rates appear to be 3 to 4-cent increases.

In response to Manager Harris' inquiry, Town Council reiterated that they agreed with the Police Department and Fire Department salary increases necessary for recruitment and retention.

4. FY:27 Annual Budget Public Input

Darla Letourneau, Weaverville resident, noted she was concerned with the long-term vision on big projects, and she cautioned to keep a broader perspective in mind to plan for years to come, for example new public safety buildings and investments.

5. Added Items

Councilmember Barnett added that he and Councilmember Young met with LOSRC regarding a regional historic museum site. There is a scheduled AdventHealth community update meeting on May 18th at 4:00 pm at the Weaverville Community Center.

6. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business and without objection, Mayor Lawrence adjourned the meeting at 7:11 p.m.



Mayor



Town Clerk

