

**TOWN OF VALDESE
TOWN COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING
JUNE 2, 2025**

The Town of Valdese Town Council met on Monday, June 2, 2025, at 6:00 p.m., in the Town Council Chambers at Town Hall, 102 Massel Avenue SW, Valdese, North Carolina. The Council meeting was live-streamed on YouTube @Townofvaldese. The following were present: Mayor Charles Watts, Mayor Pro Tem Gary Ogle, Councilwoman Rexanna Lowman, Councilwoman Heather Ward, Councilwoman Melinda Zimmerman, and Councilman Glenn Harvey. Also present were: Town Manager Todd Herms, Assistant Town Manager/CFO Bo Weichel, Town Attorney Tim Swanson, Town Clerk Jessica Lail, and various Department Heads.

Absent:

A quorum was present.

Rev. Wesley Hendricks from Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Valdese, offered the invocation. Following the invocation, Mayor Charles Watts led in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

OPEN FORUM/PUBLIC COMMENT:

RESOLUTION OF APPRECIATION – BO WEICHEL Mayor Watts presented a Resolution of Appreciation to Bo Weichel for his service as Interim Town Manager.

The 2025 Valdese Town Council expresses its appreciation to

BO DANIEL WEICHEL

For his outstanding service as Interim Town Manager
August 23, 2024, through May 1, 2025

During this special assignment, he made significant contributions, enabling the Valdese Town Council to make policy decisions in the town's best interests. He exceeded the Council's expectations for his extra assignment through extraordinary initiative, hours, and effort while fulfilling his regular responsibilities as

Assistant Manager and Chief Financial Officer.

May 5, 2025, with appreciation by:

Mayor Charles Watts and Council members Glenn Harvey, Rexanna Lowman, Gary Ogle, Heather Ward, and Melinda Zimmerman

OPEN FORUM/PUBLIC COMMENT GUIDELINES: Councilman Ogle read the following open forum/public comment guidelines: The Council shall provide at least one period for public comment per month during a regular meeting, unless no regular meeting is held that month. Any individual or group who wishes to address the Council shall inform the Town clerk, any time prior to the start of the meeting, and provide their name, address and subject matter about which they wish to speak. Person(s) must be present if they wish to address the Council. Comments should be limited to five minutes per speaker.

Open Forum is not intended to require Council or staff to answer impromptu questions. Speakers will address all comments to the entire Council as a whole and not one individual member. Discussions between speakers and the audience will not be permitted. Speakers will maintain decorum at all times. Speakers are expected to be courteous and respectful at all times regardless of who occupies the Council chairs. These guidelines will help ensure that a safe and productive meeting is held and all those wishing to address the Council will be afforded the opportunity.

SCOUT TROOP 192 – FLAGS – DR. JONAS JOHNSON – 309 BOUCHARD AVE NE, VALDESE: Dr. Johnson, speaking as Scoutmaster of Troop 192, addressed Council regarding three items:

1. Flag Retirement Ceremony – The troop would like to hold a flag retirement ceremony during the July 4th celebration downtown.

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2. Replacement of Downtown Flags – The flags placed downtown by the troop for holidays are worn and in need of replacement. Dr. Johnson estimated they need 30 new flags (2.5' x 4'), costing approximately \$600 if purchased at \$20 each. The flags are property of the Town of Valdese.
3. Missing Flag Pole Holes – Some downtown sidewalk repairs have removed or covered existing holes used for flag placement. Dr. Johnson requested the Town consider reinstalling those holes to avoid gaps. He noted this could potentially be an Eagle Scout project, but that would be several years out.

FOOD TRUCKS – BRANDON BOYKIN – 901 ELDRIDGE ST SE, VALDESE: Mr. Boykin, co-owner of Myra's along with Wesley, addressed Council regarding concerns with current food truck ordinances. While supportive of food trucks during special events and festivals, he expressed concern about their operation, particularly when serving the general public as they are serving the special event. He noted that this impacts the limited customer base available to downtown brick-and-mortar businesses that pay local taxes and rent. Mr. Boykin requested that Council consider amending the ordinance to limit weekday food truck operations in order to reduce direct competition with local restaurants.

ADVERTISEMENT – RUSS BLEVINS – 131 BOBO AVE, VALDESE: Mr. Blevins, owner of Rusty Antiques, addressed Council with concerns about advertising restrictions and the impact of Town events on his business. He expressed a desire to use flashing lights to attract customers but was informed this is not allowed under current Town rules. He requested clarification on what forms of advertising are permitted. Additionally, Mr. Blevins noted that street closures during festivals significantly reduce traffic to his business, often causing him to close early due to lack of customers.

MERCHANTS – SANDRA WALKER – 124 MAIN ST W., VALDESE: Ms. Walker thanked Council for their continued support, noting the positive impact it has had on community events. She shared that due to weather, a recent event had to be canceled but announced a new series of events to be held at Jacumin Plaza on the fourth Saturdays of June through September (June 28, July 26, August 23, and September 27), including bingo from 6–8 p.m. followed by a Christian movie and fellowship. Ms. Walker stated that while the Merchant Advisory Committee has not yet met this month, she has received strong interest from local merchants to continue hosting community events like bingo, which have successfully brought shoppers into downtown businesses.

Regarding the flag discussion, Ms. Walker proposed approaching the 30 merchants who participated in previous events to see if each would be willing to purchase one flag, matching the number needed. She suggested the Town could then handle sidewalk hole repairs, making it a mutually beneficial partnership.

CONSENT AGENDA: (enacted by one motion)

APPROVED BUDGET REVIEW #1 MINUTES OF APRIL 15 & 16, 2025

APPROVED SPECIAL CALLED MEETING MINUTES OF APRIL 25, 2025

APPROVED CLOSED SESSION MINUTES OF APRIL 25, 2025

APPROVED AGENDA REVIEW MEETING MINUTES OF APRIL 28, 2025

APPROVED CLOSED SESSION MINUTES OF APRIL 28, 2025

APPROVED REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF MAY 5, 2025

APPROVED BUDGET REVIEW #2 MEETING MINUTES OF MAY 12, 2025

APPROVED COUNCIL CONTRACTORS MEETING MINUTES OF MAY 22, 2025

APPROVED VALDESE ABC BOARD TRAVEL POLICY Valdese ABC Board Travel Policy for FY 25-26



1018 MAIN STREET WEST • VALDESE, NC 28690 • PHONE 828-879-2227 • FAX 828-874-0332

TRAVEL POLICY

Proposed Date: May 19, 2025
Effective Date: July 1, 2025
Re: Adoption of Town of Valdeese Travel Policy
JULY 01, 2000, "Revised"

The following guidelines will be used as a travel policy for all employees traveling on Valdeese ABC Board business:

1. Reimbursement of travel expenses-

Meals will be covered on a per day rate. (Based on the current Federal Per Diem Rate.) The Federal Per Diem Rates listing (found online at www.gsa.gov) is updated on an annual basis in October. If the traveler's destination is not listed on the website, the standard rate is used.

When traveling to attend a conference, where some meals are provided by the conference, remaining meals not provided by the conference will be eligible for reimbursement on a reasonable and actual basis (receipts required).

When on a trip not involving an over-night stay, expenses (i.e. mileage, meals) will be eligible for reimbursement on a reasonable and actual basis (receipts required).

Lodging will be covered for reasonable and actual cost (receipt required). Unless attending a conference, the Federal Per Diem Listing should be used as a guideline in determining reasonable cost.

2. Board credit cards may be used to reserve lodging. Travel related cost however, should not be charged to the credit cards. All travel expenses will be covered through travel advances and / or reimbursements.
3. It is the responsibility of the General Manager to determine which meal allowances are eligible for reimbursement to employees for partial day travel. Reimbursement will be for reasonable and actual cost (receipt required).
4. All requests for travel expense reimbursement (i.e. meals, lodging, mileage, etc.) must be accompanied by a travel expense report.
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5. Other issues-

- Transportation: As a general rule, it is the Board's policy that an employee is authorized to use a private vehicle and be reimbursed at the current standard mileage rate. The current standard rate shall be the same as paid by the Town of Valdese following the IRS rate.
- Registration: Registration fees are generally paid in advance directly to the vendor, not from travel advance.
- Advances: The Board does permit employees to request advances whenever an estimated trip cost exceed \$25. If the cost is less than \$25, employee must seek reimbursement when the trip is completed.

Adopted this the 2nd day of June, 2025

Chairman

Attest:

Secretary/Treasurer

APPROVED LEASE AGREEMENT AT THE OLD ROCK SCHOOL WITH DREAM CONNECTIONS Lease agreement for rental space at the Old Rock School. The Dream Connections Lease is in the amount of \$1,100 per month.

APPROVED RESOLUTION FOR SALE OF TOWN-OWNED PROPERTY - 800 PINEBURR AVE SW
RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING UPSET BID PROCESS ON
800 PINEBURR AVE SE, VALDESE, NC

WHEREAS, the Town of Valdese (the "Town") is the owner of that certain tract or parcel of real property (the "Property") situated in Lovelady Township, Valdese, North Carolina commonly known as 800 Pineburr Ave SE, Valdese, North Carolina, PIN: 2743136398, REID: 65564;

WHEREAS, pursuant to N.C. Gen. Stat. §160A-269 a city or town may receive, solicit, or negotiate an offer to purchase property and advertise it for upset bid. When the offer is made and council proposes to accept it, the council shall require the offeror to deposit five percent (5%) of his bid with the city clerk, and shall publish a notice of the offer. The notice shall contain a general description of the property, the amount and terms of the offer, and a notice that within ten (10) days any person may raise the bid by not less than ten percent (10%) of the first one thousand dollars (\$1,000) and five percent (5%) of the remainder. When a bid is raised, the bidder shall deposit with the city clerk five percent (5%) of the increased bid, and the clerk shall re-advertise the offer at the increased bid. This procedure shall be repeated until no further qualifying upset bids are received, at which time the council may accept the offer and sell the property to the highest bidder. The council may at any time reject any and all offers;

WHEREAS, on March 6, 2025, East McDowell Street Properties, LLC initially offered to purchase the Property from the Town for one hundred thirty-four thousand four hundred ninety and 00/100 dollars (\$134,490.00.00) and deposited six thousand seven hundred twenty-four and 50/100 dollars (\$6,724.50), or five percent (5%) of its bid, with the Town Clerk;

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WHEREAS, on May 1, 2025, East McDowell Street Properties, LLC made an additional upset bid for one hundred forty-eight thousand three hundred seventy-eight and 23/100 dollars (\$148,378.25), which became the last and highest bid for the Property, with no upset bids having been received within the ten (10) day upset bid period; and

WHEREAS, the Town does not need the Property, and the Town therefore desires to accept the offer and sell the Property to East McDowell Street Properties, LLC upon the terms and conditions hereafter set forth.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 160A-269, the sale of the Property to East McDowell Street Properties, LLC for the purchase price of one hundred forty-eight thousand three hundred seventy-eight and 23/100 dollars (\$148,378.25) is approved and the Town Manager is hereby authorized and directed to deliver to East McDowell Street Properties, LLC a special warranty deed for the Property upon receipt of the purchase price, subject to the following terms and conditions: that the Property shall be sold "as is" and subject to all existing easements; that the Town shall reserve easements for all Town utility lines located on or under the property, if any; that East McDowell Street Properties, LLC pay all legal fees associated with preparation of the closing documents and all closing costs necessary to transfer ownership of the Property from the Town to East McDowell Street Properties, LLC.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the sale of the Property to East McDowell Street Properties, LLC shall be subject to East McDowell Street Properties, LLC obtaining a special use permit for development as townhomes and/or single-family homes as required under Section 4.1-1 of the Unified Development Ordinance.

THIS RESOLUTION IS ADOPTED this _____ day of _____, 2025.

THE TOWN OF VALDESE,
a North Carolina Municipal Corporation

/s/ Charles Watts, Mayor

ATTEST:

/s/ Town Clerk

Councilwoman Ward made a motion to approve the aforementioned items on the Consent Agenda, seconded by Councilwoman Lowman. The vote was unanimous and motion carried.

End Consent Agenda

ITEMS REMOVED FROM CONSENT AGENDA: None

Councilman Harvey made a motion to add two items to the agenda, **Mobile Food Units** and **Valdese Bluff's Sewer Line Bid Results and ARPA Fund Allocation of \$800,000**, seconded by Councilwoman Ward. The vote was unanimous and motion carried.

ADDED – MOBILE FOOD UNIT Councilman Harvey mentioned that he couldn't find an existing ordinance, although there was a proposed food truck ordinance discussed in August 2021, which was postponed for six months and never revisited. He expressed the need for a clear ordinance with regulations, stating he's not opposed to food trucks but believes controls are necessary. Councilman Ogle feels that this is something we need to address. Councilwoman Lowman asked if we should ask our town manager, attorney, and planning board work together to research and bring back information. Council agreed.

Councilwoman Lowman made a motion that we ask the Town Manager to do some research to work with our Attorney and our Planning Board to come up with some information about mobile food trucks for Valdese, seconded by Councilman Harvey.

Mr. Herms asked for clarification on whether the motion included the preparation of a draft ordinance. Councilwoman Lowman confirmed that it did.

The vote was unanimous and motion carried.

ADDED – VALDESE BLUFF’S SEWER LINE BID RESULTS AND ARPA FUND ALLOCATION OF \$800,000 Councilman Harvey proposed a motion by the Council’s action on item 7-b on May 5, 2025, the Town Manager is hereby authorized to proceed with contracting for the work to be done to the extent of the amount covered by the ARPA grant, subject to final approval of the granting agency, seconded by Councilwoman Ward.

Discussion: Councilman Harvey noted that the item was not included on this agenda despite Council's previous direction, likely because staff is still awaiting final clearance from the granting agency. This clearance is necessary to ensure the agency approves the proposed project scope.

The motion under consideration would authorize staff to proceed with the project as soon as that clearance is received, avoiding further delays. Councilwoman Lowman confirmed that the funding in question consists of ARPA grant funds totaling over \$900,000, which must be spent by the end of 2026. Mr. Weichel noted these funds are reimbursable, meaning the Town must initially cover the expenses and then request reimbursement.

Council clarified that the project involves only a portion of the original scope due to time constraints, but there is optimism the agency will approve this phased approach. Construction is not expected to begin until late fall of 2025 due to required design work. It was also confirmed that no matching funds are required and the project will not cost the Town any local funds.

The vote was unanimous and motion carried.

PRESENTATION OF 2024 NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR SAFETY AWARDS Mr. Weichel presented the annual Workers’ Compensation Safety Awards through the Department of Labor, noting their importance in helping determine the Town’s insurance rating through the NC League of Municipalities. Departments with low or no workers’ comp claims over a 12-month period are eligible for either Silver or Gold level awards, with Gold being the higher distinction.

The following departments received recognition:

- Silver Award: Public Works (3rd consecutive year)
- Gold Award:
 - Police (1st year)
 - Fire (1st year)
 - Wastewater (2nd year)
 - Recreation (3rd year)
 - Water (8th year)
 - Community Affairs (14th year)
 - Administration (includes Admin, HR, Finance, Planning – 38th consecutive year)

Mr. Weichel emphasized that earning these awards is challenging, as even a single accident in a year can disqualify a department. Awards will be distributed to departments following the meeting.

FY 25-26 PROPOSED BUDGET AND SCHEDULING OF PUBLIC HEARING FOR MONDAY, JUNE 23, 2025 Mr. Weichel presented the proposed Fiscal Year 2025–2026 budget and requested scheduling the public hearing for Monday, June 23, 2025. He noted the budget reflects six to seven months of work and input from Council through multiple workshops.

The total proposed budget is \$17.6 million, comprising two funds:

- General Fund: \$7.98 million
- Water & Sewer Fund: \$9.66 million

Highlights:

- Property tax rate remains unchanged at 41.5 cents.
- Sanitation and recycling services will transition to Simply Green on July 1, resulting in some cost savings.
- Long-term debt accounts for only 2.87% of the operating budget.
- Continued contributions are being made to the street paving fund to prepare for future projects using cash where possible.
- Major utility capital projects include:

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- Water line work on Curville
- Sewer line replacements on Rodoret Drive and Jefferson Avenue
- Construction of a new electrical substation at the water plant serving all customers

The proposed budget also includes an updated fee schedule reflecting items discussed during prior workshops.

Councilman Harvey confirmed that the public hearing for the FY 2025–2026 budget is scheduled for June 23, 2025. He noted that the version presented reflects year-to-date figures through April 30 and asked whether the final version could include updated figures through May 31. Mr. Weichel indicated they could make that change if Council desired, though it would not affect the budget totals.

Councilman Harvey also revisited several items previously discussed:

- **Rock School Rental Rates:** He noted that Council had expressed interest in offering a reduced rate for nonprofits renting the Waldensian Room. Staff confirmed that the rates were updated accordingly.
- **Fund Balance:** He observed that the appropriated fund balance remains at \$290,000, the same as in the May 12 draft, and asked if that figure had changed with any adjustments. Staff clarified that it had not.
- **Residential Water/Sewer Rates:** He recalled Council's prior support for a modest increase in residential rates to help balance costs more equitably between residents and non-residents. Staff confirmed the minimum residential rate was increased from \$38.50 to \$40.00, as reflected in the proposed budget. This adjustment slightly reduced the amount needing to be borrowed but did not change the utility fund total.
- **Industrial Customer Communication:** Councilman Harvey asked whether the Town had followed through with plans to notify major industrial users of proposed rate increases. Staff confirmed that letters were sent to the top 20 industrial customers and that one response was received and shared.

Mr. Weichel noted that the industrial water and sewer rate increases represent approximately \$160,000 in the proposed budget.

Mayor Watts scheduled the Public Hearing for Monday, June 23, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers for the proposed budget process.

APPROVED RESOLUTION FOR MASSEL AVE SE SIDEWALK PROJECT Mr. Weichel presented a resolution of commitment for a sidewalk project submitted through the Local Administrative Project (LAP) funding program, in coordination with the COG. The Town applied for two sidewalk projects, and the Massel Avenue SE project—extending from Rodoret toward Carolina Street—has been recommended for award. To move forward, the Town must adopt a resolution committing to the project and the required 20% local match. The engineer estimated project cost is \$950,000, with approximately \$190,000 to be covered by the Town. The funding will not be needed in the upcoming budget year, as the project will require time for engineering and setup. A capital project will be established for future funding.

Councilman Ogle asked if the Town's \$190,000 match would not need to be paid upfront. Mr. Weichel said it would likely be spread over a two-year period. A capital project will be established to reserve the funds, though actual expenditures will occur later.

Councilwoman Zimmerman raised a question regarding potential utility pole relocation on the south (railroad) side of Massel Avenue and if the cost was embedded in these figures. Mr. Weichel confirmed that the road is approximately 35 feet wide, and the intent is to avoid relocating power poles by placing curb and gutter next to them and installing the sidewalk alongside. Placing the sidewalk on the north side would require dealing with residential retaining walls and potentially constructing a new wall, which would significantly increase costs.

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TOWN OF VALDESE**

**RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING TOWN OF VALDESE TO SUBMIT AN
APPLICATION TO THE GREATER HICKORY METROPOLITAN PLANNING
ORGANIZATION IN THE AMOUNT OF \$950,000.00 AND WILL COMMIT \$190,000.00
AS A LOCAL MATCH FOR MASSEL AVENUE SIDEWALK.**

WHEREAS, The Greater Hickory Metropolitan Organization (GHMPO) issued a Call for Project Applications to agencies in its jurisdiction for Locally Administered Project Program Funding (LAPP), AND;

WHEREAS, Funding is available for Bicycle and Pedestrian, Intersection, and Transit Project Applications, AND;

WHEREAS, The funding opportunity requires a 20% local match, AND;

WHEREAS, the Town of Valdese is submitting an application for Sidewalk on Massel Avenue, from the existing sidewalk along Rodoret, to Carolina Street SE, with a total estimated project cost of \$950,000.00, and a local match of \$190,000.00.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Town of Valdese does hereby authorize and commit to the Massel Avenue Sidewalk Project Application, and will commit \$190,000.00 as cash match for the Massel Avenue Sidewalk Project.

Adopted this _____ day of _____, 2025

/s/ Charles Watts, Mayor

ATTEST:

/s/ Town Clerk

Councilwoman Ward made a motion to approve the Massel Ave sidewalk project, seconded by Councilman Ogle. The vote was unanimous, and motion carried.

APPROVED CAPITAL PROJECT ORDINANCE AMENDMENT – POOL STRUCTURE Mr. Weichel provided an update on the AP grant, noting that the project is nearing completion. The grant scope was successfully revised to include the pool dome structure, which had not been initially confirmed. As a result, the Town will now receive the full \$500,000 grant and will not need to use fund balance to cover that portion of the project. The total project cost was approximately \$700,000. This amendment adjusts the project ordinance accordingly and improves the Town's fund balance position for the upcoming year.

Valdese Town Council Meeting

Monday, June 2, 2025

Capital Project Ordinance Amendment # 2-31

Subject: Pool Structure

Description: This amendment updates the project budget to account revenue from the awarded AP grant for the pool dome and ADA work

Proposed Action:

BE IT ORDAINED by the Council of the Town of Valdese that, pursuant to Section 13.2 of Chapter 159 of the General Statutes of North Carolina, the capital project ordinance for various capital projects funded from a variety of sources is hereby amended as follows.

Section I:

Revenues available to the Town to complete the projects are hereby amended as follows:

Account	Description	Decrease/ Debit	Increase/ Credit
31.3970.000	Transfer from General Fund	500,000	
31.3970.001	NC Grant		500,000
31.3970.002	Private Donor Grant Match		
31.3970.003	Capital Campaign		
Total		\$500,000	\$500,000

Amounts appropriated for capital projects are hereby amended as follows:

Account	Description	Increase/ Debit	Decrease/ Credit
Total		\$0	\$0

Section II:

Copies of this budget amendment shall be furnished to the Clerk to the Governing Board, to the Budget Officer and the Finance Officer for their direction.

Councilman Harvey made a motion to approve the amendment, seconded by Councilwoman Ward.

Discussion: Councilman Harvey highlighted that one of the reasons that Mr. Weichel received a plaque earlier in the evening was the successful handling of nearly \$2.5 million in grant funding. This included the \$500,000 pool dome grant, the \$800,000 in ARPA funds, and the recently awarded sidewalk grant of over \$900,000. He emphasized the importance of how the Town managed these grants—particularly the reallocation of sidewalk funds through the Greater Hickory MPO and the successful amendment of the pool dome grant. He commended the Town's Chief Financial Officer for the exceptional effort in rewriting the pool dome grant to secure the funding, noting that while it was a major success, it's not something easily replicated.

Councilwoman Lowman expressed appreciation for retaining the grant funding and inquired about the status of the \$100,000 private donation originally intended for the pool project. Mr. Weichel clarified that the donor has requested the funds be used for a different, yet-to-be-determined project. The funds will remain with the Town in the capital project fund until the donor designates their preferred use. It will not be used for the pool project.

Vote: The vote was unanimous, and motion carried.

APPROVED DESIGN-BUILD CONTRACTOR FOR PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDINGS Councilman Ogle made a motion that we go into contract with DR Reynolds to build our public safety facility or remodel the 215 Main Street, seconded by Councilwoman Ward.

Discussion: Councilman Harvey asked for clarification on what it is that we're contracting for. It was clarified that the motion is to proceed with Phase One listed in the RFQ by contracting with Dr. Reynolds to evaluate and bring back options for the Board's final decision. The RFQ includes three options: (1) a new fire department facility, (2) a combined police and fire department facility, and (3) remodeling the existing facility

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at 215 Main Street. The Town Attorney confirmed that moving forward with these three items under the contract is appropriate.

Vote: The vote was unanimous, and motion carried.

PRUDENT USE OF TOWN ROLLING STOCK ASSETS Councilman Harvey requested that the Town Manager review the current personnel policy regarding the use of Town vehicles. While the policy itself is not problematic, he expressed concerns about how it has been administered in the past and emphasized the importance of ensuring compliance with IRS regulations. He asked that the review include comparisons with both small towns and larger cities such as Morganton, Hickory, and Lenoir, and that the findings be reviewed with the Town Attorney and auditors.

Mr. Herms agreed, noting the likely need for a formal take-home vehicle policy and stated staff would work on a draft to bring back to Council.

FAILED - RESOLUTION ON CIVILITY AND PROTOCOL FOR THE 2025 MUNICIPAL ELECTION

Councilman Harvey made a proposed motion desiring to formalize their commitment to engage in a campaign that encourages public confidence, the Valdese town council hereby adopts by signature, the following resolution:

**RESOLUTION OF THE TOWN OF VALDESE COUNCIL –
REGARDING 2025 ELECTION**

WHEREAS, Article III, Division I of the Charter and Other Related Laws of the Town of Valdese governs the election process for the mayor and members of the council; and

WHEREAS, the mayor and members of council are also governed by a Code of Ethics, adopted October 4, 2010, which provides, in part, that the “stability and proper operation of democratic representative government depend upon public confidence in the integrity of the government and upon responsible exercise of the trust conferred by the people upon their elected officials”; and

WHEREAS, the mayor and members of council, fully appreciating their duties and obligations to the Town of Valdese as elected officials, and desiring to formalize their commitment to engage in a campaign that encourages public confidence, desire to adopt this resolution in connection with the 2025 election.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Town Council that, as elected officials, the mayor and members of council commit to participate and engage in the 2025 election in a manner that instills public confidence in the integrity of the government and the responsible exercise of the trust conferred by the people upon their elected officials and, in doing so, will strictly adhere to the principles established in the Code of Ethics and expect the town manager to enforce the adopted personnel policy. This resolution is not intended to and shall not infringe upon the First Amendment rights of the mayor and/or members of council or their ability to campaign for themselves and/or others when not carrying out their official duties.

ADOPTED this _____ day of _____, 2025.

Seconded by Councilwoman Ward.

Discussion: Councilman Harvey stated that the Council has agreed on wanting the upcoming election to run more smoothly and reflect more positively on the Town than the 2023 election.

Councilwoman Zimmerman expressed respectfully that she does not see the need for the proposed resolution, noting that all elected officials are already bound by a code of ethics and required ethics training. She added that her upbringing and personal values guide her to live with civility and respect. Councilwoman Zimmerman said if she was a candidate, she would also be subject to Board of Elections rules. For these reasons, she stated she is not in favor of the resolution and would not sign it.

Councilwoman Lowman asked Attorney Swanson in regard to First Amendment Rights, if she was a candidate could she put a political sign for another candidate in her yard, and if she could give money to another political candidate. Attorney Swanson answered, yes.

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Councilwoman Lowman made this statement: "If I am a candidate for office in the Valdese Town elections, I hereby affirm my commitment to adhering to the town code of ethics and all laws related to the election process. I recognize the importance of conducting a campaign that not only meets legal standards but also upholds the highest moral principles. If I am a candidate, I will strive to conduct myself in a manner that instills public confidence in the integrity of my campaign. My aim is to engage with the community transparently and honestly, fostering trust and respect among all constituents. Additionally, If I am a candidate, I will uphold the foundations of my Christian faith, allowing my values to guide my actions and decisions. I believe that public service is a sacred trust, and I am dedicated to serving the citizens of Valdese with integrity, compassion, and sincerity. Since I am already expected to follow the Town Council Code of Ethics and laws related to the election, I do not see any reason to have a document that asks me to follow ethics that I have already pledged to uphold. I see no reason for this resolution."

Councilman Harvey expressed confusion over the resistance to the proposed resolution, noting that Council members had ample time to review and discuss it. He explained that the resolution was drafted by Attorney Swanson and reflects what he believed was a shared agreement among Council members. While acknowledging that everyone already complies with the code of ethics, he stated the resolution simply formalizes that commitment in writing.

Councilwoman Ward stated that she will not publicly support any municipal candidates in the upcoming election, including through yard signs, donations, or social media, as she believes it can create unnecessary division. She said she would be willing to sign the resolution to affirm her commitment to civility but does not see it as necessary, given that the Council has already pledged to uphold the code of ethics. She emphasized her desire to stay out of campaign activity due to the negativity experienced during the 2023 election, which affected her and her family personally. She concluded by saying that while people have the freedom to support candidates, she chooses not to participate in municipal election endorsements.

Councilman Ogle stated he does not see a need to sign a resolution, as he already agrees with its intent and will continue to follow the town's existing policies and code of ethics.

Mayor Watts turned his Mayor seat over to Mayor Pro Tem Gary Ogle to make a statement. He stated that all council members have sworn to uphold the existing code of ethics and, as such, he does not see a need for the proposed resolution.

Councilman Harvey expressed concern that despite the existing code of ethics, some council members in 2023 engaged in negative campaigning and supported inappropriate social media activity. He noted that an active campaign page from that election remains and is still being supported by a current council member.

Councilwoman Ward stated for the record that she will not support any candidate in future municipal elections. She shared that the 2023 election brought turmoil, including personal attacks and online exposure of her home, which frightened her children. While acknowledging others may choose differently, she believes that just because one can participate in election activities doesn't mean one should. She emphasized her intent to remain neutral moving forward.

Vote: Councilman Harvey and Councilwoman Ward – Yes, Councilman Ogle, Councilwoman Lowman, and Councilwoman Zimmerman, No – The motion failed.

Mayor Pro Tem Gary Ogle returned the chair back to Mayor Watts.

APPROVED CONSIDERATION OF CITIZEN COMMUNICATION Councilman Harvey made the proposed motion in fulfillment of the commitment to full and open communication with citizens the council will provide information in printed form along with monthly utility bills beginning with a summary of major council actions during 2025, including the 2025 ad valorem tax rate that will be established with the budget to be adopted on June 23, 2025, seconded by Councilwoman Zimmerman.

Discussion: Councilman Harvey noted that the Town previously distributed a printed quarterly newsletter with water bills, but it stopped in September 2023. He emphasized that many residents are not online or on social media and often pay bills in person with cash. Referring to the recent citizen survey, he pointed out that nearly as many residents preferred printed communication as electronic. He suggested reinstating the

printed newsletter to provide important updates—such as upcoming changes to trash service—to ensure all citizens are informed.

Councilwoman Lowman asked how much this would cost. Mr. Weichel estimated the cost of a one-page, double-sided printed newsletter insert at approximately \$300–\$400 per issue if sent only to in-town customers. If also sent to outside customers, the cost would increase to around \$800. These amounts include mailing the newsletter along with the utility bills.

Councilman Harvey recalled that last year, a letter from the Mayor was sent with the June or July utility bills outlining town accomplishments and tax rates. The letter was well received. However, he noted that many residents still remain unaware of town happenings, as he encountered numerous people in 2023 who did not know what was going on.

Councilwoman Zimmerman acknowledged the need to communicate with residents who don't have internet access. She suggested amending the motion to issue a newsletter every two months instead of monthly, starting in July, to reduce costs while still providing important updates to citizens.

Councilman Harvey expressed that the cost of \$300–\$400 per month for a newsletter included with water bills is reasonable. He noted that currently, council decisions are only shared through newspapers, which may not be comprehensive or fully accurate. He supports a one-page monthly newsletter to keep residents informed. There was discussion on whether this would require a budget amendment, with the recommendation to review later in the year. The newsletter would primarily go to in-town residents, with special notices (like water rate changes) sent to outside customers as needed. The recent trash and recycling notice was sent only to inside customers.

Vote: The vote was unanimous, and the motion carried.

APPROVED CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION REGARDING APPOINTMENTS TO TOWN BOARDS, PANELS, AND COMMITTEES Councilman Harvey made a motion to request the Town Attorney to review and recommend potential steps required to make Valdese residency a requirement for all council appointed committees, panels and boards, seconded by Councilwoman Ward.

Discussion: Councilman Harvey noted he hasn't conducted a formal poll but referenced that Morganton requires committee applicants to be residents. He agrees with this approach, emphasizing that residents pay taxes, vote, and elect officials, and are eligible to serve on the council and planning board and advise on council decisions and fund allocations.

Councilwoman Ward asked if there would be exceptions for individuals such as business owners or pastors who are active in the town but not residents. She also referenced the discussion about grandfathering in current board members and asked how that would apply. Councilman Harvey emphasized this would be just for the Town Attorney to review and recommend some steps.

Vote: The vote was unanimous, and the motion carried.

APPROVED APPOINTMENTS TO BOARDS/COMMISSIONS/COMMITTEES

- **TOWN BOARD DISCUSSION**
- **NON-TOWN BOARD APPOINTMENTS**
 - i. **VEDIC – TOWN MANAGER AND OTHER APPOINTMENTS/REAPPOINTMENTS**
 - ii. **BDI – TOWN MANAGER APPOINTMENT**

Mr. Herms presented board appointment recommendations, noting that some positions require Council approval for him to serve as Town Manager. He also mentioned the VEDIC Nominating Committee has recommended reappointments and new terms for a few other individuals.

Councilman Harvey explained that the VEDIC bylaws designate board members, including the Town Manager as an ex-officio member, requiring formal appointment. He noted Valdese has the authority to make seven board appointments and currently has four up for approval—one term completion and three additional members. He expressed concern that some nominees are not residents of Valdese or Burke

County but instead live in Caldwell and Catawba counties. He questioned why the VEDIC Nominating Committee is recommending individuals from outside the area for positions intended to represent Valdese.

Mr. Herms acknowledged he does not yet fully understand all of VEDIC's bylaws but explained that the organization has expanded from focusing solely on Valdese to serving as a statewide small business lending agency. He noted that VEDIC seeks board members with relevant experience and qualifications, not necessarily individuals representing Valdese directly. Mr. Herms indicated that the board nominations are intended to support VEDIC's broader mission rather than just local representation.

Councilwoman Lowman made a motion to appoint the VEDIC appointments to the Board of Directors, Todd Herms, Lily Laramie, Donna Zamora, Kylie Gera, and Bo Weichel, seconded by Councilwoman Ward. The vote was unanimous, and the motion carried.

Councilwoman Lowman made a motion to appoint Todd Herms to the BDI Board, seconded by Councilman Ogle. The vote was unanimous, and the motion carried.

FAILED - CONSIDERATION OF POLICY GUIDELINES FOR CITIZENS AND PUBLIC ACCESS TO COMMUNITY CENTER FACILITIES DISCUSSION Mr. Herms proposed a pilot program to open Old Rock School on Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., running from July through October. The goal is to collect data over four months and return to Council with a recommendation to continue, adjust, or discontinue the program. He noted the need to stay within part-time employee hour limits per state retirement regulations and emphasized that this trial period would help determine if additional staffing is needed. The pilot is set to begin the first Saturday after the July 4th holiday.

Councilman Harvey expressed appreciation for the proposed pilot program and noted the item had been previously tabled at the May meeting. He offered a broader motion to support the Town Manager's efforts.

Councilman Harvey made a motion that the town manager review relevant financial factors, attend and visit related events, and get to know a broad cross-section of citizens to recommend a schedule of hours for the Old Rock School cultural center and the town's Recreation Center and tourism office to optimize the return on the investment and annual operating cost of these facilities and the benefit to citizens and businesses that fund them through taxes and contributions, seconded by Councilwoman Ward.

Discussion: Councilman Harvey stated the intent of the motion is to give the Town Manager time and flexibility to become familiar with the town, noting several responsibilities were placed on him immediately upon arrival.

Councilwoman Lowman said new policy guidelines aren't needed. The Town Manager has a plan to monitor the tourism desk at the Old Rock School on Saturdays from July to October. He will review the financials and results. She said he is capable of handling the situation and we should let him do the job he was hired to do.

Discussion clarified that the pilot program would ensure a part-time staff member is visibly available at the Old Rock School on Saturdays to assist tourists and visitors, including those visiting the art gallery operated by a nonprofit. Currently, staff are often occupied behind the scenes during events, so this would improve visitor access and information. A published schedule would inform tourists when the facility is open. The program aims to formalize these hours and support tourism while allowing the Town Manager time to get familiar with the town.

Vote: Councilman Harvey and Councilwoman Ward – Yes, Councilman Ogle, Councilwoman Lowman, and Councilwoman Zimmerman, No – The motion failed.

Mr. Herms confirmed with the Council that despite the motion failing, the pilot program will still proceed as planned.

STATUS OF ONGOING OR APPROVED PROJECTS

- i. **Public Safety Facilities Update** Mr. Herms provided an update on the Public Safety Building, noting that the Council has approved entering into a contract for Phase One, and work on that phase will begin soon.

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- ii. **Water Plant Upgrade Project/Lenoir Interconnect Project** Mr. Herms updated on the water plant upgrade project with Lenoir and Interconnect. The team is reviewing recorded drawings to understand existing structures and equipment and developing construction documents. Field investigations were completed in May, with results to be shared with the council in the coming months. They are reviewing the existing backwash systems, focusing on improving pump capacity and efficiency, and are contacting equipment manufacturers for specifications and quotes. Mr. Herms noted potential long lead times for equipment replacement may affect the project timeline.
- iii. **Recreation Center ADA and Pool Cover** Mr. Herms provided an update on the Recreation Center ADA improvements. The awning has been removed, and footers for the gymnasium ramp have been poured. Work on the tennis court fence has been delayed slightly due to weather but should have started. Automatic door hardware has been ordered and is expected to arrive soon. Staff are holding bi-weekly Zoom meetings with the pool cover company and remain on schedule for construction to begin in late August. Storage arrangements for the structure during the summer have been discussed.

MANAGER'S REPORT Town Manager Todd Herms reported:

Family Friday Nights Kickoff Celebration is scheduled for Friday, June 6, 2025, 7:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m., with The Tonz, at the Temple Field. Concerts will continue every Friday until August 29, 2025.

Next Regular Council meeting scheduled for Monday, June 23, 2025, 6:00 p.m.

MAYOR AND COUNCIL COMMENTS: Councilwoman Ward expressed appreciation for recent community events, highlighting the Granville Morrow Fun Fish Day as a great success, with excellent food and strong community participation. She also praised the Recreation Department and volunteers for their efforts. Additionally, she commended the Valdese Merchants Advisory Committee for organizing the Beach Bingo events, which successfully engaged the community and supported local businesses in the absence of the May concert series. She concluded with a personal note, wishing a happy anniversary to her husband, Michael Ward.

Councilwoman Lowman commended the Recreation Department, noting that on Friday the Special Olympics team was departing for state competition and EMT training was taking place at the pool. She also recognized Marc Sharpe and the police department for recent positive news coverage about the police department's chaplain program and the department's current intern. She congratulated all involved.

Councilwoman Zimmerman acknowledged Pastor Bill Roberts from First United Methodist Church for his involvement in the police chaplaincy program and for providing invocations at meetings. She noted he is moving to Forest City and expressed appreciation for his service.

Mayor Watts echoed Councilwoman Ward's comments about the Fun Fish Day, praising Joey Lindsay and the recreation staff for their hard work and dedication. He also thanked the American Legion volunteers and everyone involved for making the event a success.

ADJOURNMENT: At 7:42 p.m., there being no further business to come before Council, Councilwoman Lowman made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Councilwoman Zimmerman. The vote was unanimous and motion carried.

Town Clerk

Mayor

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