**Town of Lake Santeetlah**

**Public Hearing Minutes- Budget (Zoom Meeting) Corrections Draft**

**April 24, 2021**

Mayor Hager called the meeting to order at 10:00AM. Council members Carlton, Predmore, Simons, and Haag were present for the meeting. Town Administrator Matheson and Town Clerk Postell were also present.

Councilmember Haag made a motion to open the hearing. Carlton seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Councilmember Simons made a motion to open public comment. Haag seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**Review and Discussion of the FY 2021-22 TOLS Budget:** Mayor Hager reviewed specific items of the proposed budget: The tax rates from the local towns and counties, Andrews, Fontana Dam, Robbinsville, Bryson City and Santeetlah. With a proposed tax increase from .26% to .35% the TOLS revenue would increase approximately $70,000.00. This increase would help with costs associated with paving the roads given the nationwide increase in oil and gas prices.

Councilmember Carlton indicated some things in this budget are unavoidable costs and some are things that council suggested be added for public consideration.

Mayor Hager stated one-third of the town’s revenue comes from sources other than tax revenue. Over $100,000.00 comes from the Powell Bill. Sales and Use Tax Distribution will benefit the town about $82,000.00 this upcoming year.

**Public Comment:**

Property Owner Harper questioned as to what public pressures necessitate the .35% tax increase and if the budget has been looked over thoroughly to see if money could be moved from other line items to avoid the tax increase.

Harper also expressed concerns of property owners within the TOLS abandoning local government and returning to county government because of tax increases.

Property Owner Degarmo commented on the substantial tax increase being unaffordable for some homeowners within the TOLS.

She also commented on the cost of the truck bed, and front entrance.

Property Owner Emerson commented on why the budget Public Hearing date originally set in May in past years.

Emerson also commented on several items such as: continuing the meeting at a later date, the Zoning Administrator cost, concerns with the way the security cameras were pointed, cost of legal fees, kudzu removal alternatives, lake water quality testing and the water availability fee. (I will attach her questions to these minutes.)

Property Owner Gross had numerous questions concerning the budget- 11 questions concerning the water fund and 11 questions concerning the general fund (I will attach his questions to these minutes). He did not propose solutions.

Gross also commented on the use of the funds from the Powell Bill.

Property Owner Lane asked what would be cut within the budget if the TOLS did not increase the tax rate. He did not purpose solutions.

Property Owner Danforth commented on the cost of the Front Entrance. He did not purpose solutions.

Councilmember Carlton made a motion to close public comment section of the hearing. Haag seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Councilmember Haag stated the public should be able to return at a later date with comments and express further concerns and the tax rate increase is overdue.

Haag also commented on minor items such as kudzu removal and lake water quality testing.

Councilmember Predmore suggested increasing tax rates to .45% and cutting out things that we do not need to do. Also suggested continuing the public comment with a later meeting. He asked Gross and Emerson to present solutions at next meeting. They agreed.

Councilmember Carlton commented on the suggested tax rate of .35% being a substantial increase and lowering the .35% by taking a second look at the budget with a tax increase of .30% being $20,000.00 in cuts within the budget.

Councilmember Simon commented on paying down the water loan if other things were cut within the budget.

Carlton suggested that a specific goal be set to analyze down to .30% tax rate increase and determine what can be cut and what does not to avoid the argument of a wish list or a necessity.

Mayor Hager stated a specific number cannot be set at this time without going back to the budget and determining what can be cut and what cannot. The tax rate increase will be between what is currently .26%, proposed .35% or higher.

**Announcements:**

The Continued Public Hearing will be held Saturday, May 15, 2021 via Zoom at 10:00AM. Details will be sent out at a later date.

**Motion to Continue:**

Councilmember Predmore made a motion to continue this budget hearing to May 15, 2021. Simon seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

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Jim Hager, Mayor Morgan Postell, Town Clerk