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**Subject:** September 22, 2022, the day Becky Johnson, The Mountaineer, went un-bold.

It is a rare thing in life when someone goes from **bold** to un-bold. This is one of those moments. Becky Johnson, dumb-as-a-brick reporter for the Mountaineer, wrote two (2) articles this week, and was able to get them past **Vicki Hyatt**, liberal hack writer for the Mountaineer, and catapulted herself from being bold to un-bold. Additionally, the “dumb-as-a-brick” description will be set aside for the moment. On the other hand, **Cory Vaillancourt** boosted his stature with a new title of “Liberal Hack Political Editor”.

Legend: If any name is in **bold**, it can't be a good thing.

What's going on here?

Most of this new activity was related to the Town of Waynesville Board of Aldermen meeting on 9/13/2022. The following people were present at that meeting, as follows:

- **Cory Vaillancourt**
- Becky Johnson
- Me.

There were several major developments at that meeting. Starting with my description on 9/13/2022, see on [www.haywoodtp.net](http://www.haywoodtp.net) -

[Town of Waynesville Aldermen Suspend Grant to Nicole Kott, Helping Hands of Haywood. 9/13/2022...](http://www.haywoodtp.net/pubII/220913AldermenSuspendGrantToKott.pdf)

<https://www.haywoodtp.net/pubII/220913AldermenSuspendGrantToKott.pdf>

The three elements to my post were:

- **Rob Hites** to start security wandering people attending future Aldermen Meetings,
- Aldermen voted to suspend disbursements from American Rescue Plan to **Nicole Kott**
- **Anthony Sutton** goes berserk.

Almost a week later, Becky Johnson finally posted her report about the same meeting, on 9/20/2022 -

‘Nonprofit that housed homeless in hotels suffers setback’

<https://www.themountaineer.com/news/nonprofit-that-housed-homeless-in-hotels-suffers-setback/article/9142bb68-38d1-11ed-89a1-772426d33680.html>

In that article (attached to the end of this piece, courtesy of the Mountaineer for including the article body in the source code of the on-line article), Becky Johnson took the time to provide the rationale for people attending the meeting clapping when the motion to suspend **Nicole Kott's** future disbursements were approved. Becky Johnson stepped out into the lobby outside the meeting room, listening in on a lively discussion of **Anthony Sutton** going berserk. Unfortunately, Becky Johnson committed the same fopaux as did **Cory Vaillancourt** - misspelled Deannie Brook's name incorrectly. I believe she spells it “Deannie”, not “Deanie”.

**Cory Vaillancourt's** article appeared later, in the SMN Tabloid 9/21/2022 edition -

'Audience chastised for applauding nonprofit leader's mishap'

<https://smokymountainnews.com/news/item/34333-audience-chastised-for-applauding-nonprofit-leader-s-mishap>

[**Editor's Note:** The Smoky Mountain News Tabloid still does not charge to look at their articles, as **Jonathan Key** is doing with the Mountaineer, driving them into the ditch, so it is not included in this piece.]

The title is wrong! The audience **was not** applauding for a nonprofit leader's mishap. This is more misinformation from **Cory Vaillancourt!** The article goes downhill from there.

Three of us were there, **Cory**, Becky and myself. Two out of three.

**Cory Vaillancourt** goes on to carry the water for **Anthony Sutton**, which is usually **Vicki Hyatt's** job, being liberal hack writer. So for that little stunt, **Cory** gets the new description of "Liberal Hack Political Editor".

There were a couple of items of interest in **Cory's** article:

- **Nicole Kott** was not paralyzed in the self inflicted drunken car wreck, but evidently remains in the hospital unable to walk, (**Cory** refers to this as "an alleged DWI crash" - Seems pretty real to me).
- Cory spelled Sherry Morgan's name wrong, I believe she spells it "Sherry", not "Shari". This appears to be an intentional, derogatory spelling mistake. How about my starting to spell "**Cory**" as "**Korry**"?
- When the article was first posted, I thought I saw that **Cory** was able to get a response out of WNC Bridge Foundation, whereas no one from WNC Bridge Foundation responded to my emails. I can no longer find that reference. As I recall, the first \$50,000 of \$150,000 had been transferred, but the person referenced before, I thought, had no comment about the balance of the rest of the \$100,000.

Additionally, and adding to the reason Becky Johnson moved from bold to un-bold, was a second article she posted the next day on 9/21/2022,

'Is Waynesville sending homeless people to Maggie Valley?'

<https://www.themountaineer.com/news/is-waynesville-sending-homeless-people-to-maggie-valley/article-9505b57a-38ea-11ed-b600-a7a0b72f3ee2.html>

[**Editor's Note:** Again, this article is found at the end of this piece.]

This article was about a meeting that ran concurrent with the Town of Waynesville Aldermen Meeting over in Maggie Valley, and was covered by Kathy Ross. Becky Johnson again somehow got this past **Vicki Hyatt** and posted under her name, rather than Kathy Ross's name. Maggie Valley Aldermen were concerned about Waynesville using Motels in Maggie Valley to house Waynesville homeless people.

For these two articles, Becky Johnson gets

- an atta-boy,
- and m&m, and most importantly,
- un-bolded.

Good behavior gets it's rewards, while bad behavior does not.

Monroe A. Miller, Jr.  
Haywood County Taxpayer

A nonprofit that provided temporary shelter for the homeless in hotel rooms has been dealt another blow.

The Waynesville town board has suspended its funding for Helping Hands of Haywood amid uncertainty over who is running the nonprofit after its executive director got in an alcohol-related crash, resulting in a DWI charge. The move follows a similar decision last month by the Haywood Healthcare Foundation to also suspend its grant funding for Helping Hands.

The two funding sources were critical for the fledgling nonprofit, which began as a grassroots volunteer initiative in 2019. Helping Hands is partly to thank for mitigating the homeless problem in Waynesville by getting people off the streets and into hotel rooms. The town's financial support has routinely come under fire from critics, however, who saw Helping Hands as enabling drug-and-alcohol users to continue their lifestyle. "You aren't doing these people any favors to help them continue using," said Janet Presson, a resident who objected to the town funding of Helping Hands. "If it was my loved one, I would want them to get help with rehabilitation and getting clean. Not, 'Hey, here is a hotel room you can come into and keep using.'"

When the Waynesville town board voted to suspend funding for Helping Hands last week, several members of the audience clapped. That prompted a rebuke from Alderman Anthony Sutton. Sutton told the audience the director of Helping Hands had been injured so badly in the wreck she may never walk again. "This person has had a catastrophic event occur in their life. This is not a moment to celebrate," Sutton said. "Certain people are not going to get the assistance they need, and it will affect our community tremendously. There is no reason to celebrate it." Mayor Gary Caldwell and Alderman Chuck Dickson seconded Sutton's comment. However, the audience members later said the town board took their applause out of context. "We certainly weren't clapping because someone was hurt. That is terrible," said Sherry Morgan. Morgan has been an outspoken critic of town funding for Helping Hands, as had the other audience members who clapped. They said they had no idea the director had been hurt that badly, but stand by their position. "They gave money to a start-up nonprofit with no track record," Morgan said of the town funding. "It increases drug addiction and homelessness by making it easy to live this way." Helping Hands provided temporary housing for those who don't meet the Pathways Center criteria of being drug-and-alcohol free and aren't yet committed to turning their life around. Getting them off the street is considered a first step, however. Critics claim the program is just a free ride. "Look how attractive it is for homeless people to come to town and get to go to the party hotel," said Deanie Brooks, a Waynesville resident. Helping Hands also steps in when Pathways is full, helping those who need temporary housing after an eviction or crisis. Dickson said he believes society has a moral obligation to help the less fortunate, citing the N.C. Constitution. "It says, 'Provisions for the poor, the unfortunate, and the orphan is one of the first duties of a civilized and a Christian state,'" Dickson said. "We took an oath to uphold the Constitution of North Carolina."

What happens now?

The future of Helping Hands is unclear given the suspension of two critical funding streams. The \$150,000 grant awarded by the Haywood Healthcare Foundation in July would have funded two full-time salaries and operations. Meanwhile, Waynesville had earmarked \$35,000 a year for two years to go solely toward the cost of rooms — paid out quarterly as reimbursements to Helping

Hands based on receipts. Waynesville leaders decided to suspend that funding largely due to not knowing who was at the helm of the organization anymore. The executive director, Nicole Kott, was involved in an accident in early July that resulted in serious, debilitating injuries, as well as a drunk driving charge. Kott was alone in the vehicle and no one else was injured in the crash, which occurred along U.S. 276 in Cruso. “She is obviously the primary engine that moves that organization forward,” said Waynesville Town Attorney Martha Bradley. “She has not been in a position to provide us with a succession plan.” The town wrote a letter to Kott in late August asking whether Helping Hands was still carrying out its mission. “I am saddened to hear that you have been injured. I know that you have been in considerable pain and face a period of rehabilitation. Given your medical situation, we need to know how your organization plans to continue providing services to its constituency,” the letter stated. Helping Hands had also landed a third grant from the WNC Bridge Foundation in June, for “operating support and client services funding for shelter in Haywood County,” according to grant description. Of the \$150,000 grant, \$50,000 has been expended to Helping Hands, but the status of the remaining amount isn’t known. “We decline to comment specifically on the status of the grant awarded to Helping Hands,” said Natalie Clark, spokesperson for the Bridge Foundation. Without Kott at the helm and with grant funding in jeopardy, it’s now unclear whether Helping Hands will survive. Waynesville hadn’t heard back from Helping Hands as of its meeting last week. Helping Hands has not provided any hotel room receipts for reimbursement since prior to Kott’s wreck. Alderman Chuck Dickson questioned whether it was a moot point to suspend the funding. “She has not even requested payments. So how can we suspend something that hasn’t been requested?” Dickson asked. Bradley said that suspending the funding was a safeguard in case receipts showed up. “There will be a formal directive to town staff that we are not going to advance public funds until they come back into compliance,” Bradley said. But that’s not how the funding works. The town board must approve the quarterly reimbursements, not staff. “Staff wouldn’t be the ones doing that without our approval,” Dickson said. While Dickson questioned the rationale, he was fine with suspending the funding.

A nonprofit program to provide temporary housing for homeless people at hotels, including hotels in Maggie Valley, has prompted questions from Maggie Valley leaders. “I don’t think Maggie should be a cure for Haywood County’s homeless,” said Maggie Alderman Philip Wight. One of the main hotels for the program happens to be in Maggie Valley, namely Our Place Inn. There could be others in Maggie as well, but it’s currently a mystery.

Helping Hands of Haywood, the nonprofit behind the program, was awarded \$35,000 a year for two years by the town of Waynesville to fund hotel rooms for homeless people — paid out quarterly as reimbursements based on receipts. Maggie Valley leaders have asked Waynesville officials to share which hotels were being used, but Waynesville has deemed the receipts confidential. “To me that should be public information,” Wight said. Despite the confidentiality, it is common knowledge that Our Place Inn is one of the partner hotels. Under the program, Our Place Inn ceased operating as a hotel for the general public and was essentially converted into a defacto homeless shelter. That in turn has led to questions about zoning compliance. “We wanted to have an understanding of the activity that may be going on,” Maggie Mayor Mike Eveland. “We wanted to know what to be looking for, and if it falls within our guidelines or not.” Maggie Valley has seen an uptick in transients walking back-and-forth to Waynesville. It has also seen an increase in homeless people sleeping in parks and public restrooms. “We have to ask them to leave because you can’t be camping in parks and restrooms,” said Maggie Valley Police Chief Russ Gilliland. Maggie has also seen an increase in crime stemming from the homeless population, including trespassing and larceny. Gilliland said he can’t make a connection between the activity and the homeless people being housed in hotels, however. “They just say they’re homeless. They don’t tell us where they’ve come from,” Gilliland said. However, Eveland suspects there is a cause-and-effect correlation — something that could be more easily confirmed if the town knew which hotels were being used.

“The next morning they are walking the street because they got a room from the night and then have to leave,” Eveland said. Eveland said Maggie is far from being a homeless hotspot, however. “We haven’t had the same problems that Waynesville has, because we don’t have the facilities that these people need. If they had to pick up food or go to a counseling appointment or appear at a court date, you can’t do it here,” Eveland said. They would be looking at a three to four hour walk to Waynesville where support services are based, he said. Maggie hotels started housing homeless people during the pandemic in 2020 thanks to donations from local churches. One of the hotels at the time was next-door to the Maggie Valley Inn where Eveland worked. Homeless people would regularly walk back and forth through the parking lot en route to Dollar General, and Eveland was concerned it could be bad for business. “If people staying there don’t feel comfortable, they wouldn’t come back,” Eveland said. Maggie leaders aren’t the only ones who have asked Waynesville to share which hotels town funding is going to. Members of the public who are critical of Helping Hands mission have repeatedly called on the town to share that information. However, revealing which hotels are used could make them a target of criticism and be a turn-off to paying hotel guests — in turn impacting their willingness to serve as partners. The town is legally within its rights to withhold the receipts under the N.C. Public Records Law, under the exemption for trade secrets. But Wight said it’s an issue of accountability. “If they are touting this as a good idea that’s helping people, they should be able to show results,” Wight said. Wight said he isn’t against the program when it comes to helping people who have experienced a legitimate hardship, but not for those who are taking advantage of the system. “It’s one thing to put people up for a night because their water froze, but if you enabling people to continue a certain lifestyle, you aren’t really helping

people,” Wight said. “I think it an injustice to use taxpayer dollars to help people without accountability.” It may be a moot point, however, as the Waynesville town board voted to suspended its funding to Helping Hands amid uncertainty over who is running the organization after its executive director got in an alcohol-related crash in July, resulting in a DWI charge. See related article starting on page A1.