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Brian Barnett's first week on the job included a lot of meetings and a lot of learning, but he's ready to hit the ground running.

Barnett started Nov. 1 as Catawba's town manager, and he is the third person in six months to hold the position. The town's previous manager, Jonathan Kanipe, left his position July 1 to take a job as Columbus town manager. Eric Davis was then hired as an interim town manager while council members searched for a replacement for Kanipe.

"We think we've done a good job in selecting, and we're looking forward to working with (Barnett) for a long time," said Catawba Mayor Vance Readling at the town council's November meeting.

Barnett completed his undergraduate work at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He then received his master's degree from Appalachian State University. He worked for Mooresville as a budget analyst for about four years before accepting the manager position in Catawba.

Barnett assumes the town manager position in the wake of the town's reported financial problems. The town held a special meeting in early August to discuss its finances. The budgetary concerns came about because the town didn't budget conservatively enough, according to Readling.

During the August meeting, Davis said the town faced budget cuts of about \$280,000, which is about 29 percent of the town's budget. The council has since voted to indefinitely delay a million-dollar renovation to its town hall and fire department in light of the town's finances.

"It's not a dire situation," Barnett said of Catawba's finances. "Eric (Davis) was just looking at extreme longterm impacts. He wanted to be perfectly clear on what could happen in the future."

The town, however, does need to closely examine its spending habits, Barnett said, and the town is in the process of producing a short-term fiscal plan.

All department heads are required to submit to Barnett any incidental expenses, a practice that was continued from several months ago when the financial problems started.

"Even if our financials were rosy, I would want that to happen," Barnett said, adding that having the manager sign off on incidental expenses is standard procedure for most town managers.

Barnett doesn't anticipate any budget cuts for the town in the next few months until he gets a grasp of how the town operates and what it needs to function.

"I need to know what we spend on a regular basis," he said. "I'm keeping in mind that things break. They wear down."

Barnett's first day on the job Nov. 1 included a regularly scheduled council meeting at 7 p.m. At the meeting, he told council members he compiled a list of projects to be completed within the town.

"A town this size should have 15-20 projects going on at any one time," Barnett said. "That's a way for the citizens and council members to know what's going on. It's an inside look."

Barnett said he plans to expand the list as he continues to grow accustomed to his new position in Catawba.

"It's a way to keep you informed of what's going on, and it's a way to evaluate what we've accomplished," he said.

Barnett currently commutes from Charlotte to Catawba, but he hopes to move to the area by Christmas. His salary is \$47,000 a year.

"Everybody's been great," Barnett said. "I'm hoping to meet a lot more people."

Barnett encourages citizens to attend the council's meetings at 7 p.m. the first Monday of each month.

"We want input from our citizens," Barnett said. "And there's no better way to tell us that than to come to the meetings."

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Catawba, N.C.

O-N-E Staff Writer

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