

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF  
THE TOWN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
TOWN OF WILLIAMSTON, NC

January 8, 2024

The Board of Commissioners of the Town of Williamston met in regular called meeting on Monday, January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024, at 5:30 p.m. at the Town Hall Assembly Room at 102 East Main Street, Williamston, NC.

**PRESENT** Mayor: Dean McCall  
Commissioners: Alton Moore, Ruth Coffield, Anthony Gianpoalo, Glinda Fox, and David Richmond  
Town Administrator: Eric Pearson  
Town Clerk: Jackie Escobar  
Police Chief: Travis Cowan  
Police Captain: Beth Coltrain  
Public Works Director: Stacy Stalls  
Parks and Recreation Director: Allen Overby  
Fire Chief: Michael Peaks  
Finance Officer: Mandy Bullock  
Town Attorney: Watsi Sutton

**ABSENT**

**CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATION**

Mayor Dean McCall called the meeting to order. First, Commissioner Fox led the pledge of allegiance. Commissioner Moore offered the invocation. The Mayor extended a special welcome to Martin County Commissioner Dempsey Bond.

**AGENDA APPROVED**

The Town Administrator requested the removal of the Audit Presentation and Contract. However, the auditor did inform the Town that it would receive an unqualified audit. A clean “unqualified” opinion is the most desirable, indicating that the auditor states that the company’s financial condition, position, and operations are accurately presented in the financial statements.

The Town Administrator requested the removal of Consent Agenda Item 3: Budget Amendment.

The Town Administrator requested the addition of Tax Relief Orders under New Business Item 13 and a Closed Session for Personnel Issue NC 143-318.11(6). *It was moved by Commissioner Richmond, seconded by Commissioner Moore, and unanimously amended the regular agenda.*

**CONSENT AGENDA**

*It was moved by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Scales, and unanimously approved the consent agenda as amended.*

Items approved in the Consent Agenda are as follows:

1. Approval of the Regular Board Meeting Minutes of December 4th, 2023
2. Approval of the Special Called Board Meeting Minutes of December 13th, 2023
3. ~~Budget Amendment—Code Enforcement Technology~~
4. Confirmation of Dates and Times for the Town Board of Commissioners Annual Planning Retreat

## **OATH OF OFFICE FOR COMMISSIONER ALTON MOORE AS MAYOR PRO-TEMPORE**

Judge Regina Parker administered the oath of office for Commissioner Alton Moore as Mayor pro tempore.

## **~~AUDIT PRESENTATION~~**

## **PUBLIC HEARING**

### **Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Public Input**

The Mayor opened the floor for the FY 24-25 Public Input public hearing at 5:38 pm. The Town Administrator reported that each year, as part of the budget development process, a public hearing is held to hear the public's input. This is an opportunity for citizens to provide their ideas and thoughts for the upcoming budget. The Board directs staff on their plans during the annual board budget planning retreat.

Princess Foster, of 112 Henderson St, reported regarding the diminished living conditions in public housing. She expressed that the Housing Authority ignored various repair work orders. For example, she noted that a wood stick supported her kitchen sink. The Mayor reported that he was in contact with the Housing Authority to resolve this issue. The Housing Authority must provide the Mayor and Board of Commissioners with a written plan of action to resolve complaints.

Commissioner Fox questioned if the public hearing was the only opportunity for public input. The Mayor replied that town staff is always available for information and suggestions.

With no further comments, the Mayor closed the floor for the FY 24-25 Public Hearing at 5:43 pm.

### **Text Amendment – Inside Mini-Storage in CD Zone**

The Mayor opened the floor at 5:43 pm. The Town Administrator reported that James Lawrence requested a text amendment to the Town's Zoning Ordinance to allow mini-storage inside a downtown Commercial (CD) zoning district. Mini-storages are not currently allowed in the CD zoning district. With assistance from the Mideast Commission, the Town Administrator developed the proposed text amendment.

To allow inside mini-storage is quite common throughout the state but not common in a CD Zone. The Mideast Commission recommended that all storage be kept inside and that any approval would be a Special Use. Staff presented the amendment to the Planning Board for their consideration. Upon consideration, a motion to approve this text amendment failed for lack of a second. However, there were only 3 Planning Board members in attendance. Regardless, the Town Board has the final say in approving a text amendment. The Town Clerk has properly publicized the Public Hearing.

With no further comments, *it was moved by Commissioner Gianpoalo, seconded by Commissioner Moore, and unanimously closed the Public Hearing at 5:47 pm.*

**PUBLIC COMMENT -**

Sheila Richardson, of 129 Carolina Pines, expressed concerns regarding her water bill. She explained that her water bill had increased from \$58 to \$74 to \$91. Ms. Richardson then noted that Billing Department staff advised that it was a leak. However, she did not have a leak. She requested clarification as to why her bill was so high.

Scarlett Moore, of 131 Carolina Pines, also expressed concerns regarding her water bill. She noted that her bill fluctuated from \$74 to \$90. She also mentioned that the Billing Department had very disrespectful customer service.

The Mayor informed both residents that the board would take their concerns under advisement. The Town Administrator assured the residents that he would look into the issue.

Celebrate Recovery Ministry director noted that various clients had extremely high bills. He suggested policy changes or at least notification before water disconnects occur. The Town Administrator informed the resident that installing a notification system was in the works.

**OLD BUSINESS - None**

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Lead and Copper Service Line Grant Approval**

Ben Williams of Rivers & Associates presented an update regarding the Lead and Copper Service Line Grant. The Board granted authorization to apply for the grant at the December meeting, and the Town was awarded the grant. The grant would cover lead and line inventory and future replacement plans. Ben Williams would bring the "intent to fund" as soon as it is received. Then, Rivers & Associates will create public service announcements to inform the public. While it was usually the Town's responsibility only up to the meter, now the Town will inventory up to the home. Rivers' goal is to inventory up to the home and then seek funding assistance to replace the lines. Commissioner Fox questioned how the engineers would analyze lead and copper content. Ben Williams explained that the firm would look at the lines' points of entry and communicate with the homeowners regarding the history of the lines.

**CDBG Annual Report**

Ben Jones of the Adams Company reported that two of three homes were complete. The third home was close to completion. Funds were expended for the HVAC at Gaylord Perry Park. *It was moved by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Richmond, and unanimously authorized the Mayor to sign the CDBG Annual Report.*

**Resolution 2024-01 Amending Parks and Recreation Fees**

The Parks and Recreation Director reported a slight increase in the updated fee schedule. Commissioner Moore questioned the special event fee and requested a postponement until the special event application was approved. The Town Attorney explained that the application was still in review due to insurance concerns, not the fee. *There was a consensus to approve Resolution 2024-01, Amending Parks and Recreation Fees. Resolution 2024-01 is hereby attached with the meeting minutes and incorporated in the Town's Resolution Book for future reference.*

### **Resolution 2024-02 Amending Driveway Curb Fees**

The Public Works Director reported that Public Works provides a service where they install a curb-cut driveway pan. The current charge for this service is \$350.00. The fee does not even cover the cost of the concrete purchased. The process typically involves two employees, a concrete saw, a backhoe, and a dump truck. The dump truck is to haul off any concrete and asphalt dug up. The process from start to finish takes about 8 hours. Driveway curb cutting is not an essential service for citizens as opposed to Police, Fire, Water, and Sewer as examples of essential services. Resolution 2024-02 would raise the fee to install the curb cuts.

The Public Works Director noted that should a citizen decide to use a private contractor for this service, the Town would propose no charge for the inspection. Attorney Sutton has done her legal review of the resolution and found no issues. Commissioner Moore suggested that the Town should not include payroll and equipment costs in the fee as taxpayers already pay via taxes. Commissioner Fox noted that the Town may want to consider not offering the service due to its elevated cost. *It was moved by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Richmond, and unanimously tabled the Resolution 2024-02 to allow the Public Works Director to reevaluate costs.*

### **Appointments to the Planning Board**

The Town Administrator reported that the Planning Board had three openings. Commissioner Moore offered names of interested people, Linda Gibson and Robin Manning-Brown. Martin County must appoint two ETJ members, and those seats are currently filled. However, the board can have more than two ETJ members. Commissioner Gianpoalo requested postponing the decision to solicit more interested people, preferably in-town residents. *It was moved by Commissioner Fox, seconded by Commissioner Moore, and unanimously appointed Linda Gibson to the Town of Williamston Planning Board. It was moved by Commissioner Gianpoalo, seconded by Commissioner Richmond, and unanimously postponed filling the additional vacant seats.*

### **Amended Personnel Policy – Tuition Reimbursement**

The Town Administrator reported that the agenda item attempts to clarify the Town's Tuition Reimbursement Policy. Tuition Reimbursement has been a benefit offered to employees. The Town has received many requests for tuition reimbursement. To administer this benefit equitably, staff has tweaked the policy to be more explicit. For example, the memo adds a cap of \$10,000 for a total reimbursement amount in any fiscal budget year. The Town Administrator emphasized that the Town wants to encourage the tuition reimbursement benefit. Commissioner Richmond questioned if the \$10,000 cap was enough to cover the interested employees and if any stipulations were associated. The Town Administrator replied that Department Heads agreed with the cap amount. The Finance Officer noted that employees must have been with the Town for at least five years to request tuition reimbursement. The Mayor expressed that he was a fan of education but was concerned that employees would leave after receiving tuition reimbursement. The Town Administrator assured the Board that employees must work for two years or pay back the tuition reimbursement. *It was moved by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Coffield, and unanimously approved the memo as written and authorized it to be included in the Town of Williamston Personnel Policy.*

### **Scope of Work (SOW) for NCLM Grant Assistance**

The Finance Officer reported that the board approved a MOA in October to accept NCLM Grant Services. She further explained that the North Carolina League of Municipalities (NCLM) designated their ARP funding to support local municipalities with their grant readiness. Due to the historic amount of funding available at the federal and state levels, they assessed and identified grant services as a priority for community growth. Williamston qualified for the NCLM Grant Assistance due to its population below 10,000, financial need, and history of proper grant management. NCLM contracted with Witt O'Brien's (WOB) to provide Technical Assistance (TA) in three key areas: Grant Identification, Grant Pursuance, and Grant Management. The Scope of Work includes technical assistance identifying eligible grant opportunities for road repair and repaving, sewer installments, and repair, reducing water costs, and replacing fire engines for the City's Fire-Rescue and yet-to-be-identified grant opportunities. The Scope of Work also provides technical assistance with grant management support for road repair and repaving, sewer installments, and repair, reducing water costs, and replacing fire engine for the City's Fire-Rescue, HUD grant already received for downtown revitalization and other grant opportunities as yet awarded. The Project Timeline will begin on the agreed-upon date between the TA Contact and Williamston. For Williamston, this date is January 15th, 2024. *It was moved by Commissioner Gianpaolo, seconded by Commissioner Richmond, and unanimously approved the Scope of Work (SOW) for NCLM Grant Assistance.*

### **Contract – Point and Pay**

The Finance Officer reported that the agreement was to renew the vendor contract for utility and tax payments via credit or debit cards for three years. Point and Pay is the current vendor offering the lowest rates to customers (2.95%). This agreement will also allow Point and Pay LLC to integrate fully with the finance software Southern Software. When staff takes credit or debit payments, they must download a file and enter the payment manually. With complete integration, Point and Pay will instantly be uploaded into the software as customers pay. Point and Pay will also provide an upgraded online interface for customers to be able to view their water bill and usage. This online interface will allow staff to email or text customers with late bill warnings, street closures, or other approved notifications. Staff considered multiple other vendors providing the services described above, but they were costly to the Town and customers. This contract and upgrade will be at no cost to the Town of Williamston and no change in price to utility and tax-paying customers. *It was moved by Commissioner Gianpaolo, seconded by Commissioner Moore, and unanimously approved the Point&Pay contract.*

### **Credit Card Agreement Policy**

The Finance Officer reported that the credit card agreement policy outlines rules and guidelines for Town staff on credit card use and purchases. These guidelines are already in place; however, the Finance Department would like this to become a formal policy. All guidelines described follow the purchasing rules outlined by the Local Governing Commission. Staff developed these policies with input from the LGC, auditors, and the North Carolina League of Municipalities. Town Attorney Watsi Sutton has reviewed and approved this agreement. If approved, all Town staff credit card holders will be required to sign the agreement. *It was moved by Commissioner Richmond, seconded by Commissioner Moore, and unanimously approved the Credit Card Agreement Policy.*

**Contract with Dianne Mazo Jones – Medicaid Reporting**

The Fire Chief reported that Dianne Mazo Jones conducts the Fire Department's annual Medicaid reporting. Her proposed base fee to prepare the report is \$4,200 and a possible additional fee of an estimated \$400-\$750 for work associated with delays. The average extra reimbursement is about **\$90,000 annually**. *It was moved by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Gianpoalo, and unanimously approved the Contract with Dianne Mazo Jones for Medicaid Reporting.*

**Ordinance 2024-01 Amending Zoning Ordinance in CD Zone**

The Town Administrator reported that the 30-day requirement still needs to be met, and the Ordinance should be postponed until the February meeting. Commissioner Moore questioned why the Planning Board did not receive a second. The Mayor informed the board that he attended the Planning Board meeting and noted that one individual had the personal opinion that the business was too small. The Town Administrator reported that the proposed business would be indoors. The proposed zoning ordinance amendment was an attempt to be business-friendly and innovative without impacting downtown. With Mideast Commission's guidance, the Town Administrator was able to put many protections in place, such as permission being taken if the rules were not followed. The Town Attorney noted that since the 30-day referral period was missing, any action would have to be postponed.

**Ordinance 2024-02 – to Close River Road for Martin County 250th Anniversary Celebration**

The Town Administrator reported that Martin County's 250th anniversary wants to have a small parade to kick off an event they are planning at Moratoc Park for March 16th, 2024. This would be a short parade from River Road to the Main Street intersection closest to Highway 13 to the Moratoc Park area. River Road is an NCDOT road, so to have this parade, that road will need to be closed to through traffic on the morning of March 16th, 2024. The Town of Williamston Police Department has agreed to coordinate the parade safety. However, the Police Department will not take on any other safety or security for the remaining event. That will be the responsibility of the county. It is important to note that by closing River Road, there will be a minor impact on the NC Division of Wildlife (NCDOW) Boat ramp. Staff reached out to NCDOW to ensure their knowledge of the closure, and the NCDOW has no issue with this action. They will post the closing on their website. *It was moved by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Coffield, and unanimously approved Ordinance 2024-02 – to Close River Road for Martin County 250th Anniversary Celebration. Ordinance 2024-02 is hereby attached with the minutes of this meeting and incorporated in the Town's Ordinance Book for future reference.*

**Tax Relief Order**

The Town Administrator reported that the Tax Collector, Tiffany White, provided the tax relief order listing the adjustment made for properties reassessed by Martin County. The adjustments totaled **\$4,017.95**. *It was moved by Commissioner Richmond, seconded by Commissioner Coffield, and unanimously approved the Tax Relief Order.*

***There was a short break at 7:44 pm. The meeting resumed at 7:50 pm.***

## **DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS**

### **Public Works**

The Public Works Director reported the following:

- The department finished the CCTV and jetting portion of the Skewarkee Sewer Line Project.
- The department completed the street paving project.
- Precision Sidewalk would grind down trip hazards on the sidewalk from Watts Street to Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. Commissioner Fox questioned if areas could be added later. The Public Works Director noted that extensions could be made based on the budget.
- The director will be attending the Asphalt Preservation Management conference in Greenville.
- The department will soon repair the clock in Barnes Plaza as it has stopped working.

### **Police**

The Police Chief provided the following report:

- The Christmas Downtown event had about 350 to 400 people.
- The department assisted with the Town's annual Christmas Parade on December 7th.
- The department also assisted with a gift-wrapping event at Jamesville Elementary School and visited Mr. Edward's Civics Class at Riverside High School.
- Staff completed all mandated state reporting.
- Finally, the Chief spoke about a shooting on December 16th in the Martin Luther King Jr Drive and Melbourne Ave intersection. Two people were shot, and one was injured. The staff has worked diligently on the investigation of the tragic event. Commissioner Fox commented that she heard the gunshots and questioned if there was a way to be proactive. The Police Chief replied that the department was researching options such as shot spotters, which are very expensive.

### **Fire/Rescue**

The Fire Chief provided the following report:

- The department responded to 277 calls.
- The RRT had a state mission in Spring Hope in Nash County. A suspicious package turned out to be glitter.
- The Fire Department also assisted with the Christmas Parade and the Police Department's Downtown Christmas event.
- The department hosted its annual Awards and Christmas Banquet. The department collected unwrapped toys, which the department donated to the local Department of Social Services.
- The Fire Department secured a \$17,000 grant from the Frances M Barnes Trust for Lucus CPR device.
- The Fire Chief hired Maison Rodriguez, a Martin Community College Fire Academy graduate.
- The department awarded 10-year-old Mr. Maverick Mellette with an EMS Save and a Letter of Commendation from Chief Peaks for his actions on December 13th, 2023. Maverick recognized that his grandfather was having a medical emergency while in the parking lot of a local business. Maverick placed the vehicle in neutral in hopes it would not move. He sought help from the business by calling 911.

- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) will visit Town facilities **on February 18th and 19th**. It is a voluntary visit.

### **Parks and Recreation**

The Parks and Recreation Director reported:

- The director thanked the Town Clerk, various departments, and the Christmas Parade committee for their help with the Christmas Parade.
- Basketball registration was complete, resulting in 15 teams.
- The Gaylord Perry Park renovation was complete.

### **Finance**

The Finance Director reported:

- The department was working with Public Works on new meter installation.
- The December water bills were on time.
- Staff would be meeting with NCLM to discuss grants.
- The auditor will present the audit report in February. The Town received another unqualified audit.

### **Planning**

The Town Administrator reported:

- He reported that the unqualified audit issued by the auditor was the highest rating.
- The department was working on the removal of the Magnuson sign by following the proper steps.
- The boardwalk drawings were finalized, indicating that construction would begin soon.
- The Administrator thanked the Mayor for urging the Housing Authority meetings and holding the Housing Authority accountable.
- Dollar General broke ground near Mama's Pizza.
- He attended the Martin County Opioid Settlement meeting.
- The Administrator and Mayor met with rural hospital experts to address the hospital issue.
- The Town Clerk registered the Board for the Essentials of Municipal Government course.
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) Placer information showed that visits to the downtown have increased by 36% from 2020 to 2023.
- Commissioner Richmond and Commissioner Fox have been part of conversations regarding the Summer Music Series, which would include eight events leading into the Stampede.
- The Planning Department's vacant jobs were proving challenging to fill.
- The Board's Annual Budget Retreat was scheduled for January 25th and 26th at Moratoc Park.
- The Budget Workshop was scheduled for April 19th.
- The Town Administrator met with Michael Weaks to address leaf and limb pickup concerns.



**Closed Session – Personnel Issue NC 143-318.11(6)**

*Commissioner Richmond moved, with a second by Commissioner Fox, to go out of regular session into closed session for Personnel Issue NC 143-318.11(6) at 8:43 pm. The motion passed unanimously.*

*It was moved by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Richmond, to go out of closed session into a regular session at 9:55 pm. The motion passed unanimously.*

There being no further business, the Mayor declared the meeting adjourned at 9:55 pm.

Submitted By:

Approved By:

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Town Clerk

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Mayor