

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

June 7, 2021

The Board of Commissioners of the Town of Williamston met in regular session on Monday, June 7, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. in the NC Telecenter located at 415 East Blvd #130, Williamston, NC.

PRESENT Mayor: Joyce Whichard-Brown
Commissioners: Ronell Rodgers, Jerry Knox, Alton Moore, Al Chesson, and William Coffield
Town Administrator: Christina Craft, Interim
Town Clerk:
Finance Officer: Christina Craft
Fire Chief: Captain Kenneth Warren in place of Chief Michael Peaks
Planner and Zoning Administrator: Cameron Braddy
Town Attorney: Watsi Sutton
Public Works Director: Kerry Spivey
Police Chief: Travis Cowin
Recreation Director: Allen Overby

ABSENT Fire Chief: Michael Peaks

CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATION

The Mayor called the meeting to order. Commissioner Coffield led the pledge of allegiance. Commissioner Moore offered the invocation, after a moment of silence for the pandemic and our country.

AGENDA APPROVED

Interim Town Administrator Craft requested the addition of the Resolution for Prohibiting Parking on a Portion of Rhodes Street, and provided correct copy. Craft also added a closed session for Attorney/Client Privilege N.C.G.S 143-318.11 (a)(3). The Consideration of Viability of Utility was also added. *It was moved by Commissioner Chesson, seconded by Commissioner Coffield, and unanimously passed to approve the regular agenda as amended.*

CONSENT AGENDA

The Mayor asked if there were any adjustments to the Consent Agenda or if the Board wished any items to be removed or added to the Consent Agenda. *It was moved by Commissioner Coffield, seconded by Commissioner Moore, and unanimously passed to approve the consent agenda as amended.*

Items approved in the Consent Agenda are as follows:

- (1) Minutes of the May 3, 2021 Meetings.
- (2) Williamston Housing Authority Board Reappointments:
 - Brenda Moore
 - Tonette Speller
- (3) Williamston Appearance Commission Reappointments:
 - Doris Beacham
 - Diane Barber
 - Frances Knight
 - Marie Robertson
 - Alice Howard
- (4) Approval of Budget Amendment: Garage Salary

<u>General Fund</u>	
Regular Salaries	\$15,000.00
Insurance	<u>\$ 1,500.00</u>
	\$16,500.00

The purpose of this amendment is to appropriate funds to cover salary costs as Steve Gooding retired 5/7/2021

(5) Approval of Budget Amendment: Rescue Covid Supplies

General Fund

COVID Supplies

\$20,000.00

The purpose of this amendment is to appropriate funds to cover additional supply cost related to COVID-19.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The Mayor opened the floor for public comment.

Cindy Harrison presented concern about her March bid for property at 108 W. Main Street. After her lawyer Manning passed away, the bid goes forward tabling. Harrison stated that she and her husband are looking for investment property, but are worried about city property buying process. Concerned about the building in question having issues about trees growing from the roof, which leads to further problems.

Linda Gibson, of 311 N Elm Street, complained about excessive speed down Elm Street. Gibson states that car go by at about 50 or 60 MPH. She also includes that she has witnessed racing on that street. Gibson is afraid of a bad accident happening due to the excessive speed. Gibson states she has talking to police, a commissioner, and even inquired about speed bumps. Mayor says she has witnessed it and it will be taken for advisement.

Keisha Speller called into the meeting to discuss her neighbor parking an unused car in front of residence steps in order to bother her. She inquires about what can be done, if there is any type of nuisance ordinance in place to help with her situation.

OLD BUSINESS

COVID-19 OPERATIONS UPDATE

Vickie Manning, representing the Martin-Tyrell-Washington County Health Department, presented a Coronavirus update. Manning reassured that the pandemic numbers continue to go down. However, she does say that testing has also gone down. Martin County has 2,319 total cases, 2,263 recoveries, and unfortunately 9 active cases. There have been two new cases of Coronavirus since Friday June 4, 2021. The vaccination dashboard depicts there has been 13,360 doses of vaccine in Martin County.

APPROVAL TO KEEP TOWN HALL CLOSED

Christina Craft respectfully requested for Town Hall to stay closed until July 1st. While most places have reopened, she recommends for Town Hall to stay closed due to staffing issues and to give the Police Department time to move out.
Approved by consensus.

TARHEEL APARTMENT BUILDING EXCEPTION

Jeneane Everett, Town Accounting Services Supervisor, reported the Tarheel Building is crumbling and have yet to find a responsible owner. Greg Modlin was paid \$3,900 to barricade the building. If unpaid by the owners, the amount is normally added to taxes due on the property. This impacts the tax collection rate and how much the town can borrow. With no owners found, the Town will eventually own through foreclosure. She requested the Board to make an exception the rule, instead of being added onto taxes due on property, charge amount to the code enforcement. General Statute 168.193 Abatement of Public Nuisances addresses when citizen property is mowed or building is demolished and the addition of the cost to the taxes due on the property. Town Attorney Watsi reported the quicker you foreclose, the quicker you take ownership of a potential liability. Watsi states there is no legal authority to take ownership of the building until the statutory requirements, condemnation process, or foreclosure process are followed. Watsi advises not to move forward. If the costs were applied to code enforcement, a budget amendment would be needed. *Mayor tabled the exception request to the July meeting to allow the Town Attorney the opportunity to investigate.*

APPROVAL OF ORDINANCE 2021-4 TO CLOSE TANK STREET AND PORTION OF HUNTER STREET

After running weekly ad for two months, statutory requirements regarding signage were met to close Tank Street and portion of Hunter Street. In previous meetings, Commissioner Moore and Commissioner Rodgers expressed concern after being approached by citizens on the matter. Following their meeting with citizens at a public works compound, both the commissioners and the citizens were satisfied with the reasoning for closing the streets. NCLM has awarded \$5,000 Safety Grant for the gate. *It was moved by Commissioner Rodgers, seconded by Commissioner Moore to close Tank Street and portion of Hunter Street. All in favor.*

APPROVAL TO ADJUST CEMETERY RATES

Christina Craft reported concern regarding the low cost of our cemetery in comparison with the surrounding areas. Martin County is charging almost half compared to other places, thus bringing a lot of out of town people in. Of 79 funerals held at Woodlawn Cemetery, 39 were not of Williamston or even Martin County. Kerry Spivey, Public Works Director, recognizes what the cemetery means to the families who have lost a loved one. Spivey notes that of 184 plots, 84 of those, almost a half do not reside in town. Spivey suggests the rates need to be competitive with other community plots. The Board of Commissioners is interested in keeping it as affordable as possible for the residents of Williamston. *Decision to raise rate to \$1,150 with \$150 discount was approved by Commissioner Chesson, seconded by Commissioner Coffield. Four in favor, Commissioner Rodgers opposed.*

APPROVAL OF JULY 2021 MEETING DATE CHANGE

Christina Craft reported that the July meeting was scheduled for July 5th, however the Town Hall will be closed the 5th in observance of Independence Day on Sunday July 4th. Craft suggests to move meeting date to Monday July 12th, 2021. *It was moved by Commissioner Knox, seconded by Commissioner Moore. All in favor.*

APPROVAL OF 2021/2022 MEETING SCHEDULE

Christina Craft, asks Board to approve the schedule for upcoming fiscal year as written. Commissioner notes that the calendar has January 23rd, 2022 scheduled for a meeting, however that date falls on Sunday. Meeting date is changed to Friday January 21st, 2022. *It was approved as amended by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Chesson. All in favor.*

NEW BUSINESS

APPROVAL OF NEW TAXI FRANCHISE

Lynn Hardison submitted application to Williamston Police Department, and had it reviewed by Lieutenant Bullock and approved by Chief Cowin with no issues found. The franchise is a newly formed taxi cab service planning to operate under the name "S&H Taxi Service". The town allows for 5 new taxi franchises, as long as the owner covers the annual fee of \$15 and brings vehicles in for inspection at the Police Department. Operations cannot be discontinued for more than 30 days without board approval. *It was approved by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Coffield. All in favor.*

APPROVAL OF ORDINANCE 2021-5 PROHIBITING PARKING ON A PORTION OF RHODES STREET

Following complaints about large trucks parked both sides of Rhodes Street becoming a safety issue for the cemetery, Public Works Directs and Chief of Police have recommended to restrict parking on a portion of Rhodes Street. Ordinance has been amended to change easterly side to westerly side, and correct copy has been presented. *It was approved by Commissioner Chesson, seconded by Commissioner Coffield. All in favor.*

APPROVAL OF CDBG-NR SIGNATORY RESOLUTION AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Resolution 2021-6 authorizes certain individuals to sign. Mayor is requested to sign, as well as Attorney Sutton. These procedures are required to receive the grant. *Motion to authorize Mayor to sign was moved by Commissioner Knox, seconded by Commissioner Moore. All in favor.*

UTILITY SPECIAL REQUEST

Customers are only allowed one adjustment per year and must be a customer for at least one year to be considered for an adjustment. Ricky Davenport addressed the board about a large water leak. Prior to any exceptions it was thought prudent to wait a few months to see water usage decrease after repairs. Davenport's first bill showed usage of 118,000 gallons of water, totaling \$409. He was given an adjustment. Since having plumbing repaired his usage has dropped to 1,000 gallons equaling \$38. However, in May his usage increased to 12,000 gallons indicating another leak. He requested for the board to consider another adjustment. *Motion to allow only one adjustment per year was moved by Commissioner Knox, seconded by Commissioner Moore. All in favor.*

APPROVAL OF WATER USAGE AT COMMUNITY GARDEN

Zack Dickerson reported a request by the Community Garden to use town water. They have offered to use rain water catching barrels, but is known there has been a drought the last couple of weeks. Currently the main water usage is by those who use the restrooms there. Their request is to use the water 10 minutes per day when the rain barrels are empty. *It was moved by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Coffield. All in favor.*

VIABILITY OF WATER STUDY

At the last MCRWASA meeting, county manager James Bennet mentioned interest in regionalizing county water. This has been studied before for Martin County and Town of Williamston by McGill. The Board doesn't want to pass up economic opportunity, but are hesitant due to added liability. Commissioner Chesson states that it would be a 100-year decision, and thinks it prudent to undergo study and see how it would affect future generations. *It was tabled for now. All in favor.*

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

Public Works

The Public Works Director provided the following report:

- Public Works informs that fencing will take about 3 more weeks.
- Supervisor retired May 27th and since then a young man has been trained.
- Public Works is experiencing turnover issues, and currently has two vacancies.

Fire/Rescue

The Fire Chief provided the following report:

- He reported that construction work on the building is coming along great and is close to completion.
- Truck that was remounted still has a few weeks until repaired.
- They recently hosted Family Day in honor of their 100-year anniversary
- Staff has continued Hazmat training.

Police

The Police Chief provided the following report:

- He informed that police have participated in community events a lot more as COVID regulations are loosened.
- Construction of the new Police Department is almost completed.
- They have new technology put in play at the new building.
- He concludes by giving an invitation to tour the new Police Department in July.

Parks & Recreation

The Parks and Recreation Director reported the following:

- Softball is midseason and will finish in two and half weeks.
- Working towards getting summer programs set up, following COVID guidelines. There is limited access to school buildings and are rearranging schedules.
- The department has one vacancy.

Planning

The Town Planner and Zoning Administrator reported:

- Code Enforcement update completed for April, month of May still uncompleted and undergoing 10-day process.
- William Bland, property owner at 415 N Haughton Street where house was involved in a fire, has been informed of the code enforcement process regarding cleaning up. William Bland solicits about Town help paying 50% of clean up. Commissioner Chesson notes that the request does not conform to policy as the town usually does not cover clean-up expenses. There is a consensus to reject the request.
- Small Business Saturday has been extended to Small Business Weekend.
- Billboard on Highway 17 in Beaufort County has some damage and is to be fixed next month.

Board of Commissioner's Meeting

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CLOSED SESSION

It was moved by Commissioner Chesson, seconded by Commissioner Rodgers to go out of session into closed session to under Personnel per N.C.G.S. 143-318-11(a)(6) and Attorney/Client Privilege N.C.G.S. 143-318.11 (a)(3). The motion passed unanimously.

There being no further business, the Mayor declared the meeting adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

Submitted By:

Approved By:

Town Clerk

Mayor