

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

April 5, 2021

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

PRESENT Mayor Joyce Whichard-Brown
Commissioners: Mayor Pro Tem Ronell Rodgers, Jerry Knox (arrived at 5:54), Alton Moore, Al Chesson, and William Coffield
Town Administrator: Christina Craft, Interim
Town Clerk: Jessica Godard
Finance Officer: Linda Harrison
Police Chief: Travis Cowan
Fire Chief Michael Peaks
Planner and Zoning Administrator: Cameron Braddy
Town Attorney: Watsi Sutton
Public Works Director: Kerry Spivey

ABSENT Recreation Director: Allen Overby

CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATION

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

SWEARING IN OF TOWN ATTORNEY

Chief District Court Judge Regina Parker administered the Oath of Office to Town Attorney Watsi Sutton. Ms. Sutton's mother held the bible as the oath was administered.

AGENDA APPROVED

Interim Town Administrator Craft requested the removal of the Public Hearing (Consideration of Street Closures) and Old Business #4 (Consideration of Ordinance 2021-4 to Close a Portion of Tank Street) due to an advertising error. *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. Commissioner Moore noted three corrections to the March 12, 2021 Special Called Meeting minutes (remove John O'Daniel as Administrator, add Christina Craft as Interim Administrator, remove Police Chief Travis Cowan, add Finance Director Linda Harrison and Human Resources Administrator Martha Brown-Lilley. *It was moved by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Rodgers, and unanimously passed to approve the consent agenda as amended.*

Items approved in the Consent Agenda are as follows:

- (1) Minutes of the March 8th, March 12th, and March 25th, 2021 Meetings.
- (2) Tax Relief Order #8

Year	Name	Remarks	Total
2019	Brice Williams	Release Value for Boat	\$261.55
2020	Brice Williams	Release Value for Boat	\$282.87

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Ricky Davenport, 1471 Prison Camp Road, told the Board that he was a disabled veteran on a fixed income, and explained that his first water bill after moving into his home was \$1,400. He stated he was very sick at the time, and he was unaware that there were leaks. He stated a plumber went to his home and repaired three leaks, and it cost \$1,200 for the repairs. He stated his next water bill was only \$38, indicating the problem had been fixed. He stated he went to Town Hall to request an adjustment, but he was told that couldn't be done because he had just moved in, and there were no other bills to compare this one with. He was instructed to go before the Board with his request. He asked for mercy or any help the Board would be willing to give on his water bill. He had paid \$300 but still owed over \$1,000.

Board of Commissioner's Meeting

April 5, 2021

Page 2

Ms. Denise Edmondson, 108 N. McCaskey Road, spoke in support of her brother, Mr. Ricky Davenport. She stated the home he lived in was in bad shape and he had used all of his resources to make the house livable. She asked the Board for mercy for her brother, so he could spend that money that he would pay for the water bill on further repairs and central air/heat for his home to make it more livable.

Commissioner Rodgers asked Mr. Davenport if there were any damages to his pipes, and Mr. Davenport stated there were 3 leaks that he had to pay \$1,200 to repair. Interim Town Administrator stated the policy stated the resident had to have service for one year to get an average for an adjustment. Since this was above policy, staff needed direction from the Board on how to proceed.

Mr. John Liddick, 502 S. Haughton Street, spoke about the recent homicide involving a 13-year old very near to his residence. As part of the Celebrate Recovery ministry, Mr. Liddick spoke about his experience working with gangs and youth. He discussed some ideas he had for youth outreach in Williamston. He was asking for the Board's blessing to bring in a professor that started a Young Life group, to the area to talk with the Board about using the Gaylord Perry Park gym for outreach. This outreach could help mitigate drug violence and gang violence in the community. Mr. Liddick also discussed the importance of local churches in the area working with one another for community outreach. He stated "enough is enough", stating he will be moving soon away from the area. He finished with a Bible verse (Philippians 2).

OLD BUSINESS

COVID-19 OPERATIONS UPDATE

Fire Chief Michael Peaks provided the Coronavirus update, in the absence of Ms. Vickey Manning from MTW District Health. Chief Peaks reported the total cases in North Carolina, across the United States, and globally. There were a total of 65 active cases across the MTW district. Chief Peaks highlighted a total of 2,182 cases since the start of the pandemic across Martin County, with 41 total deaths. There were 8 new cases in Martin County since March 31, 2021. Next, Chief Peaks reported a 6% positivity rate in North Carolina, with a 3.1% positivity rate in Martin County. One outbreak was still listed in Martin County (Williamston Primary), but it was anticipated that would be removed from the outbreak list soon. There had been 6,045 first doses and 4,238 second doses given in Martin County. Martin County was in a moderate impact (light yellow) area. Lastly, Chief Peaks spoke about the second shot vaccine clinic hosted by MTW District Health that was coming up on April 10, 2021. There were some cancellations, so walk-ins would be accepted. Chief Peaks stated Martin County had received some of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, and citizens could call the Health Department for more information on that particular vaccine. Commissioner Rodgers asked if someone had received their first shot somewhere else, could they receive the second dose in Martin County. Chief Peaks stated they could, they were just asked to provide their vaccination record card to ensure proper timing of the second dose.

CONSIDERATION OF CDBG-NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION CONTRACT

The Interim Town Administrator stated the former Town Administrator had worked diligently on this grant. An award letter was received in January 2021 stated the Town received \$650,000 for neighborhood revitalization. The original requested amount was \$750,000 and that total amount was received. The contract was provided for review. The people that would receive help, their names were turned in, as part of the application process. Staff was asking for Board approval for the Mayor to sign the contract, pending review and approval from the Town Attorney. The Town Administrator recommended the Board approve the Mayor to sign the contract once the Attorney approves. If the Town Attorney did not approve, the contract could be brought before the Board at that time. Commissioner Rodgers stated he was under the impression that the recipients had already been identified. The Town Administrator stated the names were submitted, along with alternate names, in the grant application. Commissioner Chesson asked who would be administering the schedule of documents and other things involved with the administration of the grant. The Town Administrator stated staff would like to run a Request for Proposals for a grant administrator. At the April 26th, 2021 meeting, the Board could select a grant administrator for the CDBG-NR grant. It was recommended that there be a grant administrator to administer the contract, as opposed to the Town Administrator. This was questioned by Commissioner Moore. Historically, grant administrators were utilized for large-scale grants, such as the CDBG-NR grant. Commissioner Chesson stated there were usually provisions in grants to allow the utilization of a grant administrator. Commissioner Rodgers asked had any modifications been made since the original application, the Town Administrator stated there had not been any modifications from the original application. *It was moved by Commissioner Chesson, seconded by Commissioner Moore, and unanimously passed to appoint the Mayor to sign the contract documents, upon approval of the Town Attorney. Further, it was moved by Commissioner Chesson, seconded by Commissioner Moore, and unanimously passed to ask the Interim Town Administrator to seek proposals for a grant administrator for the above stated grant.*

CONSIDERATION OF CEMETERY BORDER PLANTS

Public Works Director Spivey stated he had been asked to look into plantings to go along the fence line of the new part of the cemetery. A few different nurseries and state agencies were queried to find out the best types of plantings that would be best for the cemetery. There were two different types of trees that were dwarf trees were quoted at \$421.26, with an estimated cost of \$100 for mulch. Now was a good time to plant if the plants were approved. *It was moved by Commissioner Coffield, seconded by Commissioner Knox, and unanimously passed to appoint the Mayor to proceed with the plantings at the new part of the cemetery.* Commissioner Chesson asked if the cost was in the current budget. Ms. Harrison stated a budget amendment would likely be needed. Commissioner Moore asked if this was discussed at the retreat to put in the budget. Ms. Harrison stated normally there is not a lot of extra funds in their budget. Director Spivey stated this had been discussed previously, but he did not remember budgeting or funding being discussed.

NEW BUSINESS

TARHEEL APARTMENT BUILDING UPDATE

Planning and Downtown Marketing Coordinator Zach Dickerson stated the property at 154 W. Main Street (Tarheel Apartment Building) had a second-floor collapse into the basement in February 2021. There were so many holes in the roof that it was effectively gone. Staff applied barricades initially, and a local contractor built a large-scale barricade in front of the building. The owners of the building were listed as "Community Developers Beaufort-Hyde", and Mr. Dickerson stated that entity no longer existed. The Secretary of State's website showed the last articles of incorporation were listed in 2004. Letters were mailed to the Board and Owner; the Board letters were returned; the owner was deceased. No action was requested tonight. Because of the public safety hazard of the building, it would likely need to be demolished. The recommendation was to proceed with a tax foreclosure on the building to get it in the possession of the town. Staff would likely look for state funds/grants to help with demolition. There were taxes on the books for tax years 2019 and 2020. Mr. Dickerson stated he would be further investigating the best way to proceed with the handling of the building. Commissioner Chesson asked how much it would cost for the building to be removed. Mr. Dickerson stated he had gotten a quote previously of around \$500,000. New quotes would be obtained if the Town moved forward with demolition/removal. The property was over 300,000 square feet. Commissioner Chesson stated he felt the building would implode at some point. The façade would likely push forward into the street, according to Mr. Dickerson. Concerns were mentioned about the new business next door to the property, as well. Commissioner Chesson stated the need to be prepared with some sort of emergency funds to clean up when the building finally collapsed. Mr. Dickerson stated he had already spoken with Kevin Richards with the Mid-East Commission about applying for an additional demolition grant, like what was used for the Mitchell building. Commissioner Moore asked if there was a way for staff to reach out to all business owners on Main Street, recommending they have their buildings inspected. Mr. Dickerson stated letters were sent to business owners downtown when he started, introducing himself and speaking to the conditions of the buildings. Not much response was received, other than some interest in a façade grant. None of the absentee property owners responded to those letters.

CONSIDERATION OF AUDIT CONTRACT FOR YEAR ENDING JUNE 2021

Interim Town Administrator Craft explained Carr, Riggs & Ingram had been the auditing firm with the Town for many years. The upcoming audit would cost more to do a single audit, which was required when any federal grant funds were received and spent (federal grants for Police Department and Fire Department). The total cost of the audit would be \$36,400, which included the extra funds for the single audit. Commissioner Rodgers asked how long Carr, Riggs & Ingram had been the auditing firm for the Town of Williamston. The Town Administrator stated this was the third year with this particular branch. Ms. Harrison stated the Town previously worked with another branch of the auditing firm, but the branch they used to work with stopped doing single audits. The pros and cons of continuing to work with Carr, Riggs & Ingram were discussed. A single audit required so much more detail than the normal audits. In 2020, a single audit was not done. Commissioner Rodgers expressed his concerns with three vehicles in 2019 that were not caught by the auditor, but the banker picked it up. The auditor did not have the vehicles listed in the report. The Commissioners were asked to sign for approval of three vehicles after they were already obtained. There were three vehicles that were in put into an escrow account that the Town had paid for and interest was accrued. This was not caught by the auditor, but in fact the bank caught this. The funds were obligated, but the Town purchased those vehicles with the general fund (a loan was still available but had not been used, the bank did have the money allocated).

Commissioner Chesson spoke about how difficult finding an auditor can be in Eastern North Carolina. The local accounting office would not do audits. It was also stated that the LGC has to approve the audit after it is completed. Attorney Sutton asked if there had ever been any issues with untimely submissions of the audit report to the Treasurer. The Town Administrator stated a different branch of Carr, Riggs and Ingram had been utilized in the past, and there

were times the audit was behind. Ms. Harrison stated one year, the Town was late on the audit. The previous year, there was an extension issued, and the audit was submitted on time. The current branch (Goldsboro) had been much better about getting audits completed on time. There were discussions of possibly enforcing a penalty on the auditing firm if the audits were not completed in a timely manner, and the deadline was not met. Commissioner Chesson stated he was all for seeking other firms, but he knew there just weren't many to choose from. Discussions were had about possibly seeking proposals for a new auditor for this year, but the process would take too long to get an auditor in place for this year's audit. *It was moved by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Chesson, and unanimously passed to approve the audit contract for the year ending June 2021, upon approval of the Town Attorney. Further, it was moved by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Chesson, and unanimously passed to seek out request for proposals for an auditor for the year ending June 2022, and compare to the current auditor by December 2021.*

CONSIDERATION OF CEMETERY FEE INCREASE

Public Works Director Spivey stated the operation costs for the cemetery continued to increase, and staff had to be ever mindful of the budget to operate and maintain the cemetery. The new area created a larger area to maintain (grass mowing, rocks for driveways, etc.). Discussions had been had about rates for the cemetery. The last time rates were adjusted was in 2013. The fee was \$600 for plots for in-town and out-of-town residents. Staff was proposing to increase plot rates. The Board was provided with rates for surrounding cemeteries, and Woodlawn's rates were significantly lower. In the new section of the cemetery, there had already been approximately 60 plots sold. Staff was working diligently to maintain the cemetery. Next, Director Spivey discussed the open/close costs. He recommended the cost for open/close be increased for weekends and holidays. Also, Director Spivey was proposing an increase in wait time fees and re-setting of monument fees. In-town residents were receiving a \$100 discount for open/close cost, and Director Spivey wanted the Board to reflect on those fees. Mayor Whichard-Brown asked if the cemetery were to expand, where would it go. Director Spivey stated there was nowhere else, so the Board would have to reflect on that. Expansion would likely be needed in approximately 10 years. Mayor Whichard-Brown also asked why in-town residents were paying the same price as out-of-town residents. Director Spivey stated many families would purchase family plots with the in-town rates. The discount was applied at the time of open/close so the person being buried could be identified as an in-town or out-of-town resident.

Commissioner Chesson asked how many plots were available at the cemetery. Director Spivey stated he did not recall the number of available plots. Director Spivey recalled 60 plots had already been purchased in the new section of the cemetery. Commissioner Chesson stated the Town would have to decide in the future if it wanted to continue in the cemetery business, or let the private sector take over the cemetery business, once the available plots ran out. Mayor Whichard-Brown asked about another small section of property, if it could be used for graves. Director Spivey stated the particular area the Mayor mentioned was a very wet area and not ideal or appropriate for cemetery use. Commissioner Rodgers asked for clarification on wait time. Director Spivey stated staff would be advised of a time for a service. Once employees were called in at that time, and the funeral did not arrive per the scheduled time, the employees were being paid during that wait time. If a funeral business was aware of a wait time fee, they would be more proactive in scheduling. Commissioner Rodgers asked "is this a good time to do this"? Director Spivey stated there was never a good time, it was just a fact facing staff that needed to be addressed. There was not a lack of empathy, there just was never a good time to increase rates.

Commissioner Moore stated there should be advantages of being an in-town resident taxpayer. Director Spivey stated if staff could find a sure way to prove in-town residency, he would not be opposed to continuing the \$100 discount. Director Spivey expressed his concerns with people who had only been residents briefly, or people living in a rest home within the city limits. Director Spivey felt the residency requirements should be better defined. There was no form that had to be filled out when buying plots to declare the intended people that would be buried there. Discussions were had regarding proof of paying property taxes the previous year, in order to receive the open/close discount for in-town residents. There were times that family plots were purchased, and occasionally plots were sold back to the Town of Williamston for the cost that was originally paid for the plot. Commissioner Moore expressed his concerns that in-town residents deserved a better rate than out-of-towners. Commissioner Chesson stated a more in-depth look needed to be taken at the structure, regarding proof of in-town residency, and potentially stopping plot buy-backs. He suggested a comprehensive plan that would address the financial burdens of the cemetery.

Director Spivey asked if there was any possibility to approve the increase in weekend and holiday open/close fees, even without addressing the plot rates and normal open/close rate. Mayor Whichard-Brown asked about the possibility of not doing buy-backs. The Town Administrator stated that had been discussed in the past. The current guidelines stated the plot owner could only sell the plot back to the Town of Williamston. Buy-backs did not happen that often.

Board of Commissioner's Meeting

April 5, 2021

Page 5

Director Spivey stated he had originally requested action on all items, but since the Board desired further discussions, he asked if the Board could consider voting on weekend and holiday open/close cost. *It was moved by Commissioner Chesson, seconded by Commissioner Coffield, and passed 4-1 to approve the \$200/hour wait time, \$250 fee for moving a monument, and \$900 weekend open/close fee, and \$1200 holiday open/close fee. For: Commissioners Chesson, Coffield, Moore, Knox. Opposed: Commissioner Rodgers.*

DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

Public Works

The Public Works Director provided the following report:

- Typical month for Public Works
- Asphalt acquisition process was slow
- There was an upcoming retirement in the garage department. There would be a potential internal promotion, and a job posting. There was some internal interest in the upcoming position, as well.
- Generator (40-year-old) failure at the waste water treatment plant. It was cost prohibitive to run wiring over to the biggest generator, and the path of least resistance was to purchase a new, size appropriate generator. The generator that failed was approximately 100kb. It could likely be sold (had a good engine).
- Air curtain burner has been ordered (10-12 week turnaround). Chipper would be placed on GovDeals.com soon, likely after the arrival of the air curtain burner.

Planning

The Town Planner and Zoning Administrator reported:

- Downtown cleanup day scheduled for March 20, 2021 went well. Approximately 20 volunteers came out to help. The F3 men's fellowship group helped a lot. Lots of planters cleaned up on Main Street by Public Works. Williamston Downtown would likely be helping with re-plantings.
- New business on corner of Main Street and Washington Street (antique and action store) In the planning stages for the Bicycle/Ped grant received by the County
- Virtual Main Street conference was held in March
- Land Use Laws – updated zoning ordinance needed to be updated before July 1, 2021.
- Working on adopting ordinances related to vacant buildings on Main Street.
- Porky's BBQ was seeking employees, no open date was set yet.

Parks & Recreation

The Town Administrator reported the following (in the absence of Parks and Recreation Director):

- Working towards getting summer programs set up, following COVID guidelines. Some would be held outside as weather allows.
- Programs would be adjusted accordingly, according to the COVID status

Town Administrator

The Town Administrator reported:

- Annexation A original agreement included the placement of street lights, along with water/sewer. There was some opposition to the street lights by some residents.
- Interest came back for street lights. Some of the residents agreed to the street lights, but many refused to sign easements, created by Dominion Power.
- 7 easements were received to send out to residents for signature. (out of approximately 35 homeowners total)
- Other residents may become interested once the street lights are put in.

Police

The Police Chief reported:

- Recent homicide involving a 13-year old. Staff was working diligently on the investigation, along with assistance from the SBI. Staff has followed up on many leads.
- The new building was coming along. Lots of concrete work, above ceiling inspection completed, power was being transferred. Final stages of painting, electrical work, etc. The Police Chief invited the new Attorney, Ms. Sutton, for a tour of the building.
- An underground propane tank was discovered with the removal of some asphalt. The hazmat team had to assist with the burning off of that propane. The tank has been removed from the site.

- Working on the budget and finishing up the previous year's budget.
- Completion date for the building was estimated to be May 5, 2021.

Fire/Rescue

The Fire Chief provided the following report:

- In March 2021 – normal, busy month for Fire/EMS.
- Hazardous Materials team – technical advice assistance for Halifax County (leaking fuel truck that caught fire). State mission in Nash County – white powder-like substance. Local mission – burn off of approximately 800 gallons of propane.
- Fire prevention – starting installing smoke alarms, COVID pre-checks before entering homes.
- Meetings with the community college system to ensure the best quality education is being received by EMS professionals in Martin County.
- FEMA Staffing Grant. Funding for positions was denied by the County. The grant award should be announced around May 2021. Town staff would continue conversations with the County before the 4th year, when the staffing funding would be needed.
- The Barnes Foundation would likely be provide funding for a LUCUS device for Williamston Fire/Rescue, which was a mechanical CPR device.
- Building update – a few setbacks, but moving along. Some electrical issues were resolved. Carpet was down in the living quarters.

CLOSED SESSION

It was moved by Commissioner Chesson, seconded by Commissioner Coffield to go out of special session into closed session to under Personnel per N.C.G.S. 143-318-11(a)(6). The motion passed unanimously.

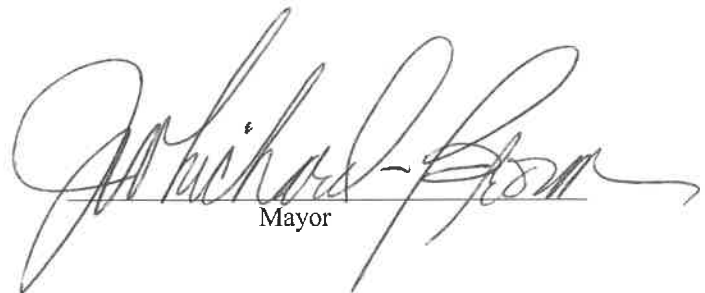
It was moved by Commissioner Knox to go out of closed session and back into open special session. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Moore and passed unanimously.

There being no further business, the Mayor declared the meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Submitted By:

Approved By:


Town Clerk


Mayor