

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

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January 24 and 25, 2025

The Board of Commissioners of the Town of Williamston met for its Annual Planning Retreat on Friday, January 24, 2025, at 1:00 pm and Saturday, January 25, 2025, at 9:00 am at the NC Telecenter 415 East Boulevard, Williamston, NC 27892.

PRESENT Mayor: Dean McCall
Commissioners: Alton Moore, Ruth Coffield, Anthony Gianpoalo, Glinda Fox, and David Richmond
Town Administrator: Travis Cowan
Town Clerk: Jackie Escobar
Police Chief: Beth Coltrain
Public Works Director: Stacy Stalls
Planning and Zoning Administrator Andrew Brownfield
Planning and Downtown Marketing Coordinator: LaShonda Cartwright
Fire Chief: Michael Peaks
Parks and Recreation Director: Allen Overby
Finance Officer: Mandy Bullock

ABSENT Town Attorney: Watsi Sutton

JANUARY 24, 2025

CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATION

Mayor Dean McCall called the meeting to order. First, the Parks and Recreation director led the pledge of allegiance, and then the Fire Chief offered the invocation.

INTRODUCTION OF FACILITATOR AND RETREAT PROCESS AND UNDERSTANDINGS GREGG PIBURN, LEADERS EDGE CONSULTING

The Town Administrator introduced Gregg Piburn of Leaders Edge Consulting as the meeting facilitator.

DEPARTMENTAL PRESENTATIONS

Overview of Budgeting Concepts

The Town Administrator overviewed budgeting concepts for Williamston, highlighting North Carolina General Statute 159-8(a), which requires local governments to maintain an annual balanced budget. A budget is balanced when estimated net revenues and appropriated fund balances equal appropriations. The presentation covered the budget's composition, including debt, obligated funds, and personnel and operational expenditures. The Administrator also reviewed revenue sources like property taxes, sales tax, fees, and EMS funding, emphasizing their impact on the budget.

The Town Administrator highlighted the tax impact on the budget and the need to maintain fund balances. He emphasized saving funds for capital projects, securing grants, and sustaining operations, recommending that the fund balance cover at least eight months of expenses for financial stability.

The Town Administrator emphasized that the budget should not rely on savings. Instead, financial planning should follow the fundamental equation: Budget = Revenues - Expenditures. This approach ensures that the town operates within its means while maintaining fiscal responsibility and long-term sustainability.

Project Updates

Shay Baggett outlined the Town of Williamston's capital projects for the fiscal year 2025-2026, detailing completed, ongoing, and upcoming projects. She aimed to provide the board with a clear understanding of these initiatives and their financial sources. Shay Baggett defined capital projects as long-term expenditures requiring significant financing, such as grants, loans, or bonds, to create, acquire, or repair capital assets. These projects typically span more than one fiscal year. She reported that projects were set for closure pending an audit. These included initiatives funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) for revenue replacement, the installation of AMI water meters, and various other infrastructure improvements.

Active Projects

1. **Gaylord Perry Park:** This project, which cost \$919,875 in total, sought to renovate the gym floor, upgrade facilities, and construct a skate park. A PARTF grant partially funded it.
2. **River Boardwalk Extension:** Funded by multiple grants totaling \$1,010,000, this project aimed to expand the Roanoke River Boardwalk and introduce a disc golf course.
3. **Electric Vehicle Chargers:** The project, primarily funded by the VW-DC Fast Priority Corridor Program, planned to install two EV fast chargers in Williamston.
4. **Sewer Asset Inventory Assessment:** The NCDEQ funded this project with nearly \$900,000, which sought to evaluate and monitor the town's sewer collection system.
5. **Downtown on the Move:** A revitalization project for downtown Williamston, backed by a \$750,000 HUD grant and additional contributions.
6. **Skewarkee Gut Sewer Outfall Rehab:** Estimated at \$2.55 million, this loan-funded project focused on reducing inflow and infiltration in the sewer system.
7. **Lead Service Line Inventory:** A \$490,000 loan-funded effort to document and submit a lead service line inventory to state and federal authorities.
8. **Community Development Block Grant Smiling Faces:** This \$667,825 HUD-funded project aimed to extend the sewer system to Smiling Faces Daycare and integrate it into the town's jurisdiction.
9. **Stream Rehabilitation Assistance Program (STRAP):** A \$275,000 project focused on removing debris and restoring water flow to mitigate flooding in Williamston.

Upcoming and Proposed Projects

- **DOT Sidewalk Project:** Planned sidewalk construction along Main Street to Highway 17, managed by NCDOT.
- **NCAS Youth Sports Project:** A \$12,960 initiative to maintain and enhance softball fields for youth sports participation.
- **Accessible Parks Grant:** An \$87,021 grant-funded effort to make Godwin Coppage Park more accessible with ADA-compliant routes, parking, and playgrounds.
- **Grant Applications in Progress:** The town pursued funding for future development through the Rural Downtown Economic Development Grant and the T-Mobile Hometown Grant.

Finance Department

The Finance Officer presented the fiscal year 2025 financial plans, emphasizing accountability for town funds and assets. The department monitored the budget, ensured compliance with financial regulations, and provided timely financial reporting to the board.

The Finance Officer outlined key goals, including maintaining financial stability, increasing tax collection rates, and maximizing investment returns. The department worked to keep expenditures aligned with revenues while efficiently managing utilities and minimizing delinquent balances. Financial oversight extended to regulations set by the Local Government Commission and other entities, with funding managed from ARPA, HUD, CDBG, and USDA grants.

Several capital projects were in progress, including Electric Vehicle Chargers, AMI Water Meter installations, Water and Sewer Asset Inventories, and the Downtown on the Move initiative. The Finance Officer noted that the new electric vehicle chargers would initially operate at a loss until usage covered costs. The Town purchases water through MCRWASA, and utility billing follows a structured cycle, with bills printed monthly reflecting usage from two months prior.

Challenges included employee recruitment and retention, benefit plans, insurance changes, and rising costs in professional services, liability insurance, and training. The Finance Officer concluded by highlighting technological updates and strategies to ensure the Town's long-term financial stability.

Fire/EMS/RRT Departments

The Fire Chief began his presentation by highlighting the department's mission to protect citizens through fire, rescue, and EMS services. Serving as a regional hazardous materials response team since 1995, the department covered 25 counties under a state contract renewed every four years. The Fire Chief reported that 2024 was the department's busiest year, with 3,109 calls. Paid staff handled all primary service calls while volunteers assisted with additional EMS and fire responses: rising EMS demand and the absence of a local hospital created financial and operational challenges. EMS vehicle replacements faced delays, with new units taking nearly three years to manufacture.

The fire division followed a 25-30 year apparatus replacement cycle. A new \$1.5 million ladder truck was expected in 2026, while the next engine replacement was planned for 2029 at \$850,000. Staffing retention and volunteer engagement remained priorities, as the growing demand required continued support. The Fire Chief committed to working with county officials on EMS solutions and pursuing grants and partnerships to secure funding. He emphasized the need for board support to sustain operations and enhance emergency response capabilities.

Parks & Recreation Department

The Parks and Recreation Administrator presented the 2025 Long-Range Planning for the Parks and Recreation Department, which focused on enhancing community life through recreation, fitness, and tourism. Public input meetings and an online survey were scheduled for February to develop five to ten-year goals aligned with town projects.

The Parks and Recreation Administrator proposed setting the Christmas Parade date for the Saturday before Thanksgiving and reviewed staffing needs. The Administrator also discussed event insurance requirements, noting coverage exclusions for inflatables.

The presentation emphasized strategic planning, staffing, event coordination, and risk management to improve parks and recreation services.

Police Department

The Police Chief presented for the Williamston Police Department, highlighting staffing shortages, budget concerns, and retention challenges. In 2024, officers responded to an average of 22-24 calls per day. Still, the department operated with only eight patrol officers, straining resources and exhausting the overtime budget.

The Chief emphasized the ongoing wage competition in law enforcement, making retention difficult. Current pay structures for officers and BLET recruits lagged behind competing agencies, prompting discussions on incentives such as pay progression, take-home vehicles, and updated policies on grooming standards.

A key proposal focused on a take-home car program, citing research that linked fleet expansion to improved officer availability, response times, and retention. The plan aimed to gradually integrate vehicles into the budget while maintaining the replacement cycle.

The Chief also proposed a percentage-based pay progression system tied to education and certifications, reinforcing professional development and recruitment efforts. The presentation concluded with a focus on sustaining the department's future by balancing officer incentives with budget constraints.

Public Works

The Public Works Director presented for the Williamston Public Works Department, which oversaw six divisions: Water, Sewer, Street, Sanitation, Cemetery, and Garage. With 34 employees, the department focused on maintaining a safe and efficient workplace while promoting professional growth.

The presentation highlighted the department's achievements, including multiple consecutive years of safety awards and recent renovations, such as upgraded security, new siding, and repainted offices. The director outlined Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) requests for the upcoming budget, including new vehicles, leaf collection equipment, sewer infrastructure updates, and fuel system upgrades to improve fleet operations.

The Water Department focused on maintaining distribution lines and hydrants while ensuring fire protection and water quality. The Sewer Department prioritized compliance with state regulations, system maintenance, and grease interceptor inspections. The Sanitation Department maintained a structured pickup schedule for yard waste and household debris. At the same time, the Cemetery Department continued its maintenance efforts and introduced new columbarium pricing. The Street Department aimed to improve paving, sidewalk maintenance, and asphalt repair.

The director emphasized the importance of scheduled equipment replacements, strategic budgeting, and continued investment in infrastructure to ensure efficiency and public service quality. The meeting concluded with a review of priorities for the upcoming year.

Planning

The Planning and Zoning Administrator presented the 2025 retreat update, outlining ongoing projects, growth areas, downtown development, and code enforcement efforts. The River Landing Boardwalk Project, which began in January 2025, experienced weather-related delays but remained on track for a May closeout. The department worked to secure a Rural Downtown Economic Development Grant to fund streetscape improvements.

The presentation highlighted key growth areas, including NC-125/Prison Camp Road, where NCDOT was upgrading Exit 512, and US-17, where the ongoing boardwalk project aimed to boost tourism. The potential reopening of the hospital and construction of a new high school near US-17 Business/South McCaskey Road were opportunities for development.

Downtown revitalization efforts continued, with increasing investor interest and the expansion of Williamston Downtown, Inc.'s initiatives. The department pursued Main Street Program recertification and participated in urban planning efforts to improve streetscaping, landscaping, and parking. Reducing downtown vacancies remained a priority, with zoning modifications supporting mixed-use development.

Code enforcement improved, with 72% of violations resolved by property owners. Due to increased property owner compliance, the Town completed 127 abatements in 2024, down from 160 in 2023. The Planning and Zoning Administrator reviewed the housing demolition process, detailing legal steps to address deteriorated and dilapidated structures. The presentation concluded with a focus on continued urban development and ordinance enforcement.

There being no further business, *it was moved by Commissioner Gianpoalo, seconded by Commissioner Richmond, and unanimously declared the meeting adjourned at 4:30 pm.*

JANUARY 25, 2025

CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATION

Mayor Dean McCall called the meeting to order. First, the Accounting Services Supervisor, Tiffany White, led the pledge of allegiance, and then Commissioner Moore offered the invocation.

DEVELOP TOWN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS GUIDING PRINCIPLES GREGG PIBURN, LEADERS EDGE CONSULTING

Gregg Piburn of Leaders Edge Consulting could not attend the retreat, so the Town Administrator filled in. Using Gregg Piburn's guidelines, the Town Administrator emphasized the importance of cohesive collaboration between board members and staff. He encouraged leaders to focus on high-level strategic planning while allowing staff to handle implementation. The session also introduced guiding principles for the board, reinforcing respect, integrity, and a shared commitment to community service.

DEVELOP GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Key Goals and Objectives for 2025-2026 were outlined, focusing on strategic growth, community health and wellness, and public safety. The board prioritized downtown revitalization, targeting the recruitment of new businesses and mixed-use developments while enhancing streetscapes and signage. The board also discussed housing opportunities, including zoning updates and grants for renovations to attract young professionals and families.

Community wellness initiatives included securing an EMS funding agreement to ensure service stability following the local hospital closure. The town aimed to recruit a primary care provider and OB/GYN and develop wellness programs in collaboration with Parks and Recreation. Safety priorities included maintaining the police camera project, increasing downtown lighting, and improving ADA accessibility at Town Hall.

Budget discussions emphasized capital improvement planning (CIP), workforce retention, and grant funding. Town leaders explored employee pay progression strategies, infrastructure investments, and potential funding sources for public works projects.

The retreat concluded with a commitment to actionable progress. Staff leaders were assigned to refine tactical action plans and provide updates to the board. Leaders expressed optimism about achieving these goals while ensuring fiscal responsibility and continued community engagement.

There being no further business, *it was moved by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Richmond, and unanimously declared the meeting adjourned at 5:06 pm.*

Submitted By:


 Town Clerk

Approved By:


 Mayor