

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

October 7, 2024

The Board of Commissioners of the Town of Williamston met in a regular called meeting on Monday, October 7<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  
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  
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, and then Commissioner Moore offered the invocation. The Mayor extended a special welcome to Martin County Commissioner Dempsey Bond, Sheriff Tim Manning, and Former Town of Williamston Mayor Joyce Whichard-Brown. Finally, the Mayor requested a moment of silence to show solidarity with western North Carolina following the devastation caused by Hurricane Helene.

**AGENDA APPROVED**

*Commissioner Richmond moved, Commissioner Moore seconded, and the regular agenda was unanimously amended to add Public Comment after the Consent Agenda.*

**CONSENT AGENDA**

*Commissioner Moore moved it, seconded it by Commissioner Coffield, and unanimously approved the consent agenda.*

Items approved in the Consent Agenda are as follows:

- (1) Regular Board Meeting Minutes of September 9, 2024 1-5
- (2) Special Called meeting Minutes of September 23, 2024 6
- (3) Special Called meeting Minutes of September 25, 2024 7
- (4) Budget Amendment – STRAP Project 8
  - StRAP NC Dept of Agriculture Grant (\$9,031.00)
  - Contracted Services \$9,031.00
- (5) Budget Amendment – LWCF Grant
  - LWCF Grant (\$222,642.00)
  - Transfer from General Fund \$222,642.00

**APPOINT TRAVIS COWAN AS TOWN ADMINISTRATOR**

The Mayor recognized and thanked Eric Pearson for his stellar performance as Town Administrator, including acquiring the highest audit rating for the Town of Williamston. He welcomed Travis Cowan as the new Town Administrator.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

*Commissioner Moore moved it, seconded it by Commissioner Coffield, and unanimously opened the Public Comment segment of the meeting.*

Joe Jernigan, of 106 E Liberty Street, presented concerns regarding excessive noise at the Old Middle School Location. The property has hosted parties with loud music and loud generators that have proven disruptive to the neighbors. While Jernigan is unsure of the correct solution, he wanted to inform the Board. The Mayor noted that the Board would take the concern under advisement.

*Commissioner Gianpoalo moved it, seconded by Commissioner Fox, and unanimously closed the Public Comment segment of the meeting.*

### **APPOINT AND SWEAR IN BETH COLTRAIN AS POLICE CHIEF**

Judge Regina Parker administered the oath to swear in Beth Coltrain as Police Chief as her husband and children held the Bible. There was a short break to congratulate Chief Coltrain and take photos.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

#### **LensLock Agreement**

The Police Chief presented the LensLock Agreement. The department had spoken of slowly transitioning from Motorola Watchguard to another camera vendor. However, staff agreed that the budget could support a complete transition. At a previous meeting, the Attorney suggested staff seek proposals for camera vendors to follow the proper bidding process due to the contract amount. However, LensLock is a sole source company surpassing the request for proposals requirement. The Police Chief requested board approval. *It was moved by Commissioner Richmond, seconded by Commissioner Moore, and unanimously approved the LensLock Agreement.*

#### **Consider River Walk Construction Contract**

Steve Janowski of Rivers and Associates presented the River Walk Construction Project. Commissioner Fox inquired about a timeline estimate. Steve noted he estimated it would take about 6 months to complete the project. *It was moved by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Richmond, and unanimously approved the Budget Amendment—Chamber Calendar Year 2024 allocation 11.*

### **NEW BUSINESS**

#### **MCNC Agreement**

UNC Fellow Lead Shay Baggett reported that the Encroachment Agreement was to allow MCNC to install fiber lines towards the old middle school on Smithwick St. *The motion died due to no motions.*

### Community Garden Discussion

The Parks and Recreation Director Allen Overby informed the Board that the Town had leased a portion of the West End Tennis Court property to the Community Garden. Former Downtown Marketer Zach Dickerson served as the liaison between the Town and Community Garden. However, with his move, the Town lost that relationship. The Parks and Recreation Department had discussed future plans on the site, including the possibility of pickleball courts, as that sport grows in popularity. The Community Garden has spurred complaints from the Town residents. The Parks and Recreation Director sought feedback from the Town Board as well as updating them on the Garden's current status. Commissioner Fox questioned if there were other location options for the community garden, adding that an area away from residences to allow public events but still publicly accessible may be more suitable. Commissioner Coffield suggested contacting Ms. Foster to see her stance on the subject. The Mayor recommended having the Town Administrator and Town Attorney evaluate the lease. Commissioner Moore emphasized that the Board did not have any issues with the Community Garden but wished to see it executed neatly and correctly. The Town Attorney indicated that the current lease had no conditions and advised the Board to consider a new lease.

### Street Paving Bid

The Public Works Director reported that the Town, following its bid process, opened four bids on September 17th, 2024, at 2:00 pm at Town Hall.

Simmons Public Utility Site Work, Inc.	\$273,097.40
Fred Smith Company	\$228,070.00
Barnhill Contracting	\$234,3875.57
Tripp Brothers Inc.	\$189,329.00

The Director recommended Tripp Brothers, the low bidder, and had done excellent work for the Town in the past. *It was moved by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Richmond, and unanimously approved Tripp Brothers to perform the 2024 Street Paving Project.*

### MCRWASA Appointment

*It was moved by Commissioner Coffield, seconded by Commissioner Fox, and unanimously appointed Travis Cowan, Town Administrator, to the MCRWASA Board.*

## DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

### Planning

The Planning and Zoning Administrator reported:

- The Planning and Zoning Administrator reported that Stampede 2024 was a success. Despite Friday's adverse weather, 56 vendors participated and approximately 7,500 visitors were attracted over two days.
- The Boardwalk Renovation Project will begin construction soon, with a meeting scheduled with representatives from the Mid-East Commission to discuss project details and timelines.
- The RDED project submission deadline has been extended to January 9th, and the necessary paperwork will be submitted in the coming months.

- Destination by Design is finalizing downtown planning, and Phase 2 of the design is expected to be available next month.
- The property at 126 W. Main Street has been removed with minimal difficulties.
- As of October 1st, the demolition project on 219 MLK Jr. Drive has progressed to the next phase, and a new demolition ordinance is expected to be presented by December 1st.
- The property at 107 Ormond Drive has been purchased by a realtor specializing in renovating dilapidated properties, and the Planning Department is contacting this realtor to obtain a site plan.

### Finance

The Finance Officer reported:

- The winners of the Cybersecurity Program were Chief Peaks, Police Officer Pope, and Police Officer Harrell.
- Staff in the Water department attended tax training and supervisory training.
- The auditor visited the Town of Williamston and is currently working on the audit.

### Police

The Police Chief provided the following report:

- The department participated in the homecoming events, the Senior Center Fall Harvest, and the Stampede.
- The department responded to 601 calls, 98 incident reports, and 39 arrests.
- The Police Chief spoke about the homicide that occurred on September 15th, Homecoming Weekend. The Police Department responded to gunshots at the City Café. Within 30 minutes, police responded to a gunshot victim at Cherry's Cupboard in Bear Grass. The victim was shot at City Café and later died at the ECU Health. The Police Department arrested one suspect on September 20th and a second suspect on October 1st.
- While the department has three new officers, the department still has vacancies.

### Parks and Recreation

The Parks and Recreation Director reported:

- The department worked on the LWCF Grant closeout.
- The Tackle Football season was halfway through.
- Flag Football and Softball would begin **on October 8th, 2024.**
- Volleyball began on October 7th, 2024
- Martin County Youth Soccer was nearing the end of its season, with about 180 participants.
- Per tradition, Public Works cooked for Town employees on both days of the Stampede.
- Martin County Special Olympics will take place at Godwin Coppage Park.
- Ben Williams assisted the department in the creation of a Parks Comprehensive Plan.

### Public Works

The Public Works Director reported the following:

- The Street Paving Project will begin **on October 8th, 2024.**
- The metal on the entry doors at the Public Works building was replaced.
- The arborist will replace the damaged trees on Main Street in October.
- Wastewater hauled 60 tons of sludge, saving the Town **\$13,000** in savings.

- Hazen and Sawyer Partnership Study meeting will take place at the Telecenter on **October 22nd, at 6:00 pm.**
- The Director urged the public to call Public Works with any concerns.
- The Mayor thanked the Public Works Department for the fast cleanup of Main Street after the Stampede.

### **Fire/Rescue**

The Fire Chief provided the following report:

- The Fire Chief congratulated Travis Cowan and Beth Coltrain on their recent appointments as Town Administrator and Police Chief.
- Three new employees start on **October 14th, 2024.**
- From the Fire/EMS perspective, the Stampede was very successful!
- A 12-person RRT Team traveled to western North Carolina to help during the devastating aftermath of Hurricane Helene. The State contract mandated that they assist. It was the first time in 29 years that this had occurred. The State chose the Town due to its high reputation. While the Town will pay the upfront cost, the State will reimburse the money. While the team was away, the department increased its onsite staffing, which ensured no interruptions in responses. The State will also reimburse the additional onsite staff. In the western part of the State, the team covered 13 miles and handled hazard mitigation. Commissioner Richmond thanked the department for their hard work.

### **Eric Pearson Final Remarks**

Eric Pearson began by thanking the Mayor and Town Board for the opportunity to share his final thoughts before stepping down. He clarified that, as a private citizen now, his views did not represent the Town or the Board.

During his 11 years with the Town, Eric noted significant improvements since 2008, when the Town had only about a month's operating cash and was on the Local Government Commission's watch list. With staff support, he increased the fund balance and successfully removed the Town from the list before leaving in 2016. This progress required sacrifices, including a year without raises, but many employees remained dedicated.

In 2021, Eric Pearson opted to retire again but was approached by the Town of Williamston to return as administrator due to past instability. He expressed his initial intent to retire but agreed to serve for at least three years, a commitment he has honored.

During his tenure, there were both challenges and successes. Two downtown buildings were demolished, while several others were remodeled. The Town secured a \$750,000 grant for downtown improvements and received approximately \$7.25 million in additional funding for projects like park enhancements and sewer expansions. Of the total \$8 million in grants, over \$3 million was obtained in the last 11 months under the new Board.

In the past three years, Eric Pearson addressed key challenges in the Town by updating the financial software, replacing outdated water meters to reduce revenue loss, and upgrading police and fire radios. Despite inflation and rising salaries, he successfully managed these tasks. A significant challenge was succession planning, as many department heads were nearing retirement. Pearson implemented a solid succession plan to ensure the Town's continued operation, which he believes has been achieved.

Board of Commissioner's Meeting  
October 7th, 2024  
Page 6

He pointed out that the Town had been reported to the State three times for alleged mismanagement, with each investigation concluding no wrongdoing, resulting in a waste of taxpayer money. He noted that the Town has received unqualified audits every year and emphasized that the recent audits were thorough and accurately recorded.

Pearson praised the Town's exceptional staff, highlighting several key members:

- Jackie Escobar
- Allen Overby
- Stacy Stalls
- Fire Chief Michael Peaks
- Planning and Zoning Supervisor Andrew Brownfield
- Downtown Marketer LaShonda Cartwright
- Finance Officer Mandy Bullock
- Martha-Brown Lilley
- Police Chief Beth Coltrain
- Town Administrator Travis Cowan

He expressed gratitude to the Board for their support. He acknowledged the staff's solidarity during a difficult period when they stood by him during a closed session after an online attack against his family. Pearson appreciated their unwavering support and wished well for those who made the harmful suggestion.

As Eric Pearson prepares to leave, he feels confident that the Town is in capable hands. Eric noted taking pride in who he is and looks forward to spending time with his family, friends, and his wonderful, caring wife.

Mayor Tina Brown approached the podium and thanked Eric Pearson for his service, guidance, and wisdom. Then, the Board expressed their gratitude and good wishes, saying good-bye to Eric Pearson.

There being no further business, *it was moved by Commissioner Richmond, seconded by Commissioner Coffield, and unanimously declared the meeting adjourned at 7:22 pm.*

Submitted By:

  
Town Clerk

Approved By:

  
Mayor