

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

January 22, 2021

The Board of Commissioners of the Town of Williamston met in regular session for a Budget Retreat on Friday, January 22, 2021 at 9:48 a.m. in the large conference room in the NC Telecenter located at 415 East Blvd #130, Williamston, NC.

**PRESENT** Mayor: Joyce Whichard-Brown  
Commissioners: Mayor Pro Tem Ronell Rodgers, Al Chesson, Commissioner Jerry Knox, Alton Moore, and William Coffield  
Town Administrator: John O'Daniel  
Town Clerk: Christina Craft  
Finance Officer: Linda Harrison  
Police Chief: Travis Cowan  
Recreation Director: Allen Overby  
Town Planner and Zoning Administrator: Cameron Braddy  
Planner and Downtown Marketing Coordinator: Zach Dickerson  
Fire Chief: Michael Peaks  
Public Works Director: Kerry Spivey  
Human Resources Administrator: Martha-Brown Lilley

**ABSENT** None

**TOUR OF BUILDING PROJECTS**

The Commissioners, Town Administrator and Town Clerk toured the contraction sites of the Police Department and Fire Department, returning to the NC Telecenter at noon for lunch with the Department Heads and the continuation of the Budget Retreat.

**CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATION**

The Mayor called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. Commissioner Knox led the pledge of allegiance, followed by a moment of silence for the COVID victims and their families. Commissioner Moore offered the invocation.

**WELCOME**

The Mayor reported Commissioner Rodgers had requested a couple week's prior to allow the Commissioners to be allowed to make opening statements. Commissioner Rodgers reported he researched the purpose of a retreat and learned it gives the opportunity to build and rebuild and restore relationships, listen and share ideas so we may work together of the betterment of the citizens. While we may not agree on everything, we must do what is right for the citizens. There are times when we must be fiscally conservative concerning finance but we must work together to upgrade citizens. We have lost citizens through death and some have moved away. I have also heard that many citizens want to return but are concerned with the infrastructures. Commissioner Coffield expressed appreciation for all of the staff but especially the Streets Department. They did a wonderful job on Martin Luther King Drive and is very grateful for the resurfacing. The job is hard and continues regardless of the weather. Commissioner Chesson reported reviewing Vision Statement which was originally done 15 years prior and it is amazing how little has changed. It is a living document and needs to be revisited every year. All of the items listed will never go away. He expressed appreciation of the department heads and their professionalism during a very difficult year. Commissioner Knox expressed appreciation for the department heads and staff. The Board is only able to do the things they do is directly related to the work done by staff. Commissioner Moore reported, after the tour of the Fire and Police buildings, the Town will be ahead of our time and the buildings are monies well spent.

**LONG-RANGE VISIONING PLAN REVIEW**

The Town Administrator reported the department heads will touch on updates with the Vision Statement during their annual updates, such as efforts to provide a drug free environment, clean and esthetically pleasing community, and growth and development. COVID has proved keeping citizens fully informed and involved in the governing of the Town a challenge. Meetings have been virtual and staff continues to utilize the local newspaper, Facebook, the town's webpage, and other social media to be available and as transparent as possible. Once the Board is able to

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fully read the document, if changes need to be made, he recommends a separate meeting to thoroughly review the plan.

#### **FINANCIAL OVERVIEW**

A financial dashboard for the last year was presented. These dashboards are designed to give a quick overview of the status of revenues and expenditures in each of the two major funds maintained by the Town. The first dashboard reflects the balances of last fiscal year. The Finance Officer reported the addition of \$100,000 into the General Fund Balance, \$100,000 in the OPEB liability and the additional \$100,000 needed for the Police Department. The Enterprise Fund broke even. There are two more payments for the annexation project. The second dashboard reflects the balances of the current year through the end of December. She reported the state-shared revenues are always two-months behind. The property tax rate is currently higher than last year at this time. The one major retailer that was late paying taxes last year has already paid for the current year. The expenditures such as property insurance and worker's compensation insurances are paid in July. There have already been 14 of 26 payrolls so it is normal for the expenses to be in the 50% mark at this time. The Enterprise Fund revenue is performing well. Water Districts I and II payments are not due until May. Powell Bill payments have been received and the street sweeper loan will begin in the next year. Commissioner Moore questioned if late tax payments have any penalties. The Finance Officer reported there are interest fees charged every month.

The General Fund balance summary shows the Powell Bill separated from the General Fund while the audit reports the two together. The overall General Fund without the Powell Bill is 55.45% of expenses as the LGC suggests for same-sized municipalities. The Financial Commitments for the General Fund include the EMS Remount. The Town Administrator anticipates another remount within the next year. There are two more payments in the Powell Bill Fund due for the annexation area which will make funds available for additional projects in the 2022/2023 year. In the Enterprise Fund, the Waste Water Treatment Plant will be paid in full this year. He plans to meet with the Public Works Director to discuss the next large project for the plant which will most likely maintain the same expense line. The other long-term commitments are ongoing with many years left before paid in full. The Storm Water fund was created to as a result of the USDA loan for the Skewarkee Canal Project. This fee is included on citizen's water bill which is sufficient to cover the payment as required by the USDA.

The Town Administrator reported the affects of the collection and billing policy shows five months of no late fees and four months of no cutoffs due to COVID-19. The accounts receivable did increase due to deferred payments. He anticipates this amount to return to normal due to the payment plans in place. The Town historically does not do cutoffs at Christmas. Commissioner Moore questioned if the citizens were able to get COVID relief funds. The Town Administrator reported Martin County has received but is unsure as to the plan. There was funding in the past but the demand was so great, the funds were depleted. He is aware of only one resident was able to receive help. Once the County finalizes the plan for the current funds, the information will be forwarded to the citizens and Board.

The Human Resource Administrator reported the Town pays \$550 per employee to MedCost monthly. The staff and administration is satisfied with MedCost as they are employee friendly and NCLM oversees the program. The wellness screenings are free and MedCost comes onsite. There were 20 employees who met the deductible of \$1500 of the \$5500 total deductible. The Town reimburses up to \$3,750 of the maximum out of pocket of \$6,000. The Town Administrator added the health screenings are a requirement by MedCost with a 10% penalty that must be paid by the employee if not completed. The loss ratio was 314% at one time during the year but dropped to 134% in December which drives the increase in premiums. The Human Resource Administrator reported the Town will most likely budget for a 20% increase but is hopeful for a lesser increase. The OPEB liability increased significantly due to interest rates. The Town has contributed \$100,000 last year, bringing the total contribution to \$963,186. The Town Administrator reported being hopeful to continue annual contributions as employees retire, the current expenses will increase. New hires after 2013 are not eligible for OPEB and will drop eventually.

The Town Administrator reviewed the aging vehicles and equipment hours per department. He noted the freight trucks with 803,642 miles will be replaced with the donated truck. The Police Department current Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is working well to make certain the vehicles are replaced timely. The average mileage of vehicles was listed per department. Some of the vehicles listed are on the Capital Improvement Plan for replacement. The replaced vehicles are sold on the GovDeals website.

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The Town Administrator reviewed the Capital Improvement requests for Budget year. Current requests total \$20,498,400. The General Fund includes a new phone system for Town Hall. When purchasing the phone system for the Police and Fire Departments, it was noted the price was not as expensive as previously thought and plan to go with the same system. A more reliable system is needed. Planning has requested a Code Enforcement vehicle. There are two new patrol vehicles scheduled for replacement. The EMS remount expense has already been committed this year but the first debt payment will be in the upcoming year. Public Works has an air curtain burner in the budget which will greatly reduce the landfill fees. There was also a dump truck that was scheduled for replacement in the current year but will likely be delayed in the next budget year. The Enterprise Fund reflects almost \$20 million in projects that will most likely be pushed to the next year. These items are maintained on this list to continue a search for grants and other funding. The Blue Frog may get pushed into next year as the Public Works Director needs to continue to evaluate the system. The Parks and Recreation has expressed a need for a new floor for the Gaylord Perry gym. The plans for Town Hall after the Police Department Relocation Project is completed will include simple maintenance to include painting and replaced flooring. A breakdown per department was submitted for review. Commissioner Chesson questioned if there is a standard inflation factor that is used in budget. The Town Administrator reported the CIP utilizes an inflation factor. Commissioner Chesson reported he firmly believes inflation will be a factor in the upcoming years as there have been so many increases in prices and lack of supplies currently. The historical Property Tax rate was submitted for review. The next evaluation should be in 2025. There are no current plans to increase the property tax or the water/sewer rates.

The Finance Officer distributed information that is done monthly which will be given to the Finance Officer in Training. Department Heads are given a monthly expense report to verify proper placement of expenses. The Mayor had questioned the ABC Distribution. The General Fund Revenues were listed by origin and the budgeted amount.

**Employee Benefit Discussion**

The Human Resource Administrator reported the employers have an increase to the Local Government Employee's Retirement System (LGERS). The base rate for non-LEO base rate will be 11.35% and LEO base rate will increase to 12.1%. The employee contribution remains at 6%. The Town Administrator reported the need to continue with a COLA annually for employees as future changes may impact employees.

The Town Administrator reported when the town completed the most recent salary and benefit assessment, the town was told to continually evaluate and assess our position to compare ourselves to other municipalities in NC. The vacation and sick accrual rates are below the state average and the Town wants to continue to be competitive. Staff recommends the Board to adopt a vacation and sick time accrual schedule following the yearly milestones and accrual rates in line with state averages. At 3 years of service, the Town drops below others in comparison to the state average. The Human Resource Administrator reported this will help in recruitment efforts. Increase to sick pay does not cost unless an employee utilizes it. It would not impact the budget as the Town already budgets for their salary. He recommends moving forward with the State average for sick leave. Two options for vacation leave were presented for review. The first option is the same as the state average. Option B is lower with 10 days for 1-year of employment, 12 days for 3 years, 15 days for 5 to 10 years, 18 days for 15 years and 20 days for 20+ years of service. This change would be for all employees but there would be variations for the employees who work a 12-hour shift. *Commissioner Chesson made a motion to approve the paid vacation plan under Option B, seconded by Commissioner Moore and passed unanimously. Commissioner Coffield made a motion to move from 10 days of annual sick leave to 12 days of annual sick leave, seconded by Commissioner Moore and passed unanimously.*

The Human Resources Administrator reported employees are eligible for the Healthcare Savings Account (HSA). This allows employees to save money for future medical expenses which is pre-taxed. The IRS has increased the maximum contribution to the HSA by \$50.

The Town Administrator presented a current holiday schedule. It was noted the employees have been given additional holiday time on Thanksgiving by closing early on Wednesday prior to the holiday. The Town Administrator requested the Board consider making the decision earlier, either now or within a couple of months prior to the holiday to allow department heads time to prepare. The Mayor reported this was to allow employees a couple of hours for last minute shopping and cooking and supported closing early. Commissioner Chesson reported the staff already have two days off for the holiday and is not in support of closing early. Commissioner Coffield agreed with Commissioner Chesson. Commissioner Moore reported if he were an employee, he would want it and asked if this could be looked at annually or a temporary basis. The Finance Officer suggested if this is to be done annually, it

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would be beneficial to staff to make the decision in October. The Town Administrator reported the additional cost to close half a day is approximately \$3600. Commissioner Rodgers questioned if Town Hall is busy with people trying to do business on the Wednesday prior. The Finance Officer reported some citizens do make payments. *Commissioner Coffield made a motion to continue with the Thursday and Friday closures for Thanksgiving with no half-day closure on Wednesday prior to Thanksgiving, seconded by Commissioner Chesson. Commissioner Moore questioned if there are many projects Public Works tries to finish with the additional time off. The Public Works Director reported he staffs his department 24 hours per day. The Mayor reported the grocery stores are crowded on that day with last minute shopping and the additional time would allow staff a jumpstart on their preparations. Commissioner Moore reported if he were an employee, he would want it and asked if this could be looked at annually or a temporary basis. The Finance Officer suggested if this is to be done annually, it would be beneficial to staff to make the decision in October. It would not allow time to change the budget as the departments such as the Fire/Rescue and Police that will receive additional holiday pay. The motion was passed unanimously.*

The Town contributes 1% match to the employees who participate in the 401K retirement plan which began last year. The Human Resource Administrator reported many employees have taken advantage of the plan. There is a proposed 2% COLA with a ½% merit increase to be included in the upcoming budget. All employees are eligible for the 2% COLA increase but the ½% merit increase is to be given at the department head's discretion as this allows the department head to show appreciation of the employees that go beyond expectations. The continuation of annual COLA increases will keep the Town in closer proximity to the pay plan. The Town is currently 11% behind the state average. *Commissioner Moore made a motion to approve the 2% COLA with a ½% merit increase, seconded by Commissioner Chesson and was unanimously passed.*

There are multiple agencies that have received Cultural Allocations from the Town in previous years. Letters have been sent to the agencies regarding their budget requests. He presented the Budget Calendar and requested the Board to review the dates. It is essential to stick with the calendar as the current Finance Director retires the first of May. If there are issues with the dates, let us know so the date can be rescheduled.

**BUDGET DISCUSSION****Street Lighting Update**

The Town Administrator reported the street light project in the annexation area is waiting for Dominion to get the easements. Easements must be signed prior to the installation of the street lights. Dominion is currently working from home and are backlogged.

**CDBG-NR Update**

The Town Administrator reported the receipt of the award letter which was less than the requested amount in the CDBG-NR grant application. When he reached out to the Department of Commerce, he was told there were questions regarding the HVAC system for the Gaylord Perry gym that were not asked. When questioned, he was told it should have been funded. The Department of Commerce reported trying to see about the additional unallocated funds. Until the CDBG-NR contract is received and approved by the Town Board, the public is not being told of the decision. Currently, there are three homes that would be torn down and rebuilt and one that would be renovated. He recommends not moving forward with the HVAC installation until the grant contract is received. The Parks Director reported if the HVAC was installed prior to the grant receipt, this would disqualify the Town for the grant.

**PROPERTY FORECLOSURES**

The Town Administrator reported the Town attempted to purchase 101 Morris Street but the Town Attorney reported there are heirs that couldn't be located. This property is located adjacent to the Fire Department and would allow for additional parking. The property is delinquent on taxes for two years with the Town and 3 years with the County. Another property the Town attempted to purchase is 401 S. Martin Luther King Drive. This property is adjacent to the Public Works area and would increase the footprint of Public Works. The Town taxes have not been paid since 2012 and the County taxes have not been paid since 2013. He recommends the Town to move forward with a tax foreclosure on 101 Morris Street and 401 S. Martin Luther King Drive. The owed taxes to the Town would be written off but the Town Attorney would have to weigh in on what would be paid towards the County taxes. It was the consensus of the Board to move forward with the tax foreclosure on both properties.

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### **COMMITTEE OF 100 AND 108 W. MAIN STREET**

The Town Administrator reported the Committee of 100 Attorney Batchelor has reviewed the donation of 108 W. Main Street and forwarded questions to the Town Attorney. Both parties are scheduled to meet next week.

### **CELL PHONE POLICY**

The Town Administrator distributed the Cell Phone policy. All language regarding employee reimbursements were removed per Board direction. The Mayor requested the decision on the policy be tabled until the February meeting.

### **SPEED LIMIT DISCUSSION**

Chief Cowan reported, at the regular meeting in January, the Board discussed issues with speeding on several town streets. He and the Town Administrator went to each street the Board reported complaints of speeding. Main Street is regulated by the NCDOT and the speed was properly posted. He contacted Jason Davidson at the NCDOT to do a site review of this area to address the need of additional signage as there are regulations regarding the distance between signs. When travelling from Martin Luther King Drive towards Pine Street, there is a "reduction in speed" sign. However, when you go to Pine Street and turn around, there are no "reduction in speed" signs present on the west side of the street. The Public Works department will repost that sign. To South Haughton, he recommends traffic enforcement. When this begins, there will be citizen complaints of law enforcement writing tickets. On Woodlawn Drive between Liberty Street and School Drive, this road is a continuous curve and the line of sight is obstructed by the curve and is not a reduced speed limit in this area. He recommends reducing the speed on in this area and traffic enforcement. On Grace Street between N. Haughton Street and N. Smithwick Street, this area is a one-block area with a straight line of sight. He recommends traffic enforcement in that area. No other target areas were received. Commissioner Coffield reported 4-wheelers and motor bikes being driven on Martin Luther King Drive on weekends. Chief Cowan reported this is an ongoing issue. The bikes are not street legal. The Town Administrator reported an ordinance for the speed limit change to Woodlawn Drive would be presented at the February meeting for Board consideration. The Mayor also requested additional enforcement on Warren Street.

### **STREET SWEEPER**

The Public Works Director reported the new street sweeper has been purchased. The old street sweeper is still currently being used as a cable on the new sweeper broke. The old sweeper is 10 years old. He recommended continuing to use the old street sweeper as it is still licensed and considered keeping the old sweeper. As it will be a backup unit, the maintenance costs will be significantly reduced. The sale price on GovDeals will most likely only be a couple of thousand dollars. Commissioner Chesson reported it would be beneficial to use until time to scrape the old sweeper. The replacement cable was received for the new sweeper but was not the correct cable. Staff is considering fabricating the cable as it costs more with it down.

### **WATER BILLS**

The Mayor reported receiving calls every month from citizens who claim to not receive their water bills and their service was cutoff. She recommends sending a bill in an envelope instead of the small cards currently used. The Town Administrator reported he would bring estimates to the February Board meeting.

### **DEPARTMENT HEADS ANNUAL UPDATES**

#### **Public Works**

The Public Works Director provided the following report:

- The department has struggled with multiple COVID exposure scares towards the first of the year. Months into the COVID pandemic, a couple of key employees on the street and lines crew contracted COVID. Most employees have designated jobs but street and lines crew work on projects in multiple departments. That resulted in a 20% labor loss in that crew. When the administrative assistant tested positive, that was a major strain on the department as she was the nerve center of Public Works. Within another month, a supervisor and the street lines supervisor was out with COVID. The virus has been a challenge for the department. The department counts this as a success as no employees were lost. All recovered and the work was completed.
- The new street sweeper had a cable break and is out of service. The old street sweeper is still licensed and was put back in service.



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Ayers Auction Hall	310 S Pearl	
Charlotte Counseling	8001 W Main	
Cakes By Becky	118 Harrison St	
Community Home Care	107 Washington St	*
Congleton Funeral Home	304 W Liberty St	
Cookout	1549 Washington St	
DGS Contracting	401 S Pearl St	
Faith Hope Love Home Health	115 E Main St	*
FJs Wings and Fries	1009 N Haughton St	
Grace & Mercy Home Care	113 E Main	*
JP Auto Sales	502A Washington St	
KidzCare Pediatrics	413 W Main	
Law Offices of Toni Moore	216 Wilson St	
Little Heaven Day Care	104 New St	
Moratoc Tattoo Company	701 East Blvd	
New York Tobacco & Vapor	306 West Blvd	
Peggy Roberson Photography	1904 W Main	
Sassy Buttafly Nail Lounge	231 Green St	
Scott Chiropractic	1075 Walmart Dr	
SS Cycle	152 W Main	*
Stop and Shop	120 West Blvd	
The Tangled Mane	106 Baltimore St	
Topnails	701 East Blvd	
Touching Hearts Home Care	150 W Main	*
Walgreen's Pharmacy	1560 US 17	
Williamston Tobacco & Vape	1063 Walmart Dr	

\* Denotes Downtown Business

- There are currently three mobile food truck vendors with annual permits.
- A new part-time Code Enforcement Officer has abated almost 30 issues since she was hired. The biggest and most frequent violations is trash and grass. Four residential structures and one commercial building have been demolished in 2020.
- He and the Town Administrator attends the RPO and the MidEast Commissions.
- Martin County has been awarded a grant for a bike and pedestrian comprehensive plan. He and Zack are on the steering committee.
- The façade grant program continues.
- The Main Street and Audubon memberships are due for renewal in the coming year.
- COVID hasn’t had an impact on the department except for the community events, such as the Carolina Country Stampede.
- Absentee property owners, residential and commercial, is an ongoing issue.
- To combat the lack of public involvement, staff has established a Williamston Downtown Inc website and are diligent on sharing information on social media.
- The Mayor reported receiving compliments on Penny Swain, regarding a trash issue which was addressed in an expeditious manner. The Town Administrator requested all Board members to forward any compliments and complaints to Town Hall.
- There is a new mural in the Barnes Plaza and has been well received by citizens.
- Of the six businesses that have moved downtown, 2 of these are new businesses.
- Several new jobs were created to include 2 fulltime jobs in SS Cycle, the Small Shop on Main has added two part-time positions, Cakes by Becky added 2 fulltime and 3 part time jobs, and Hook Hand has one fulltime and one intern.

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- Quality Shoes and Griffins Quick Lunch both closed. Another business is planning to move into the Griffin Quick Lunch location later in the year.
- There are approximately \$205,000 of private investment and \$125,000 public investments in the downtown area. The Mitchell building hindered economic development and is excited about economic development now that it has been demolished.

**Parks & Recreation**

The Parks &amp; Recreation director reported the following:

- The Basketball All-Stars was cancelled due to COVID.
- One of 9 travel tournaments were hosted. All others were cancelled.
- Softball season began in July with limited numbers and was cancelled after a week.
- CYFL Board cancelled the fall youth football season.
- The volleyball season was cancelled.
- The summer programs were cancelled.
- The Gaylord Perry Center was closed from late March through early September. It was reopened with limited capacity.
- All of the cancellations saved money on full-time and part-time staffing costs.
- Staff is currently working on a Hall of Fame section for the center.
- The next sport season will be girl's softball in April.
- The Gaylord Perry gym floor needs to be replaced due to dead spots and is searching grant options.

**Police**

The Police Chief reported:

- Thanks to the Board for the support of the Police project as it will need the majority of the departmental needs. There have been a couple of challenges to include the roof and are hopeful all unidentified surprises have surfaced. The only possible issue will be if there is a tank or grease-trap under the current parking area, although research does not support either on property.
- The only Capital Improvement Plan request for the department is the continuation of the vehicle replacement cycle.
- There have been multiple COVID scares just like the rest of the departments and citizens.
- Due to COVID, the public interactions have been limited which is disappointing as this limits our positive exposure.
- The State of NC owns the communication infrastructure and the Fire/EMS and Police Department must follow their rules. An upcoming change will require new VIPIR radios due to the increased demand on the infrastructure. The drop-dead time to have all radios replaced is July 1, 2025. We are planning how to replace all the radios which is approximately \$500,000. Currently we are looking for grant opportunities. The Town Administrator has found some ways to help by restructuring the CARES act funding. The project ordinance has been passed. While we are making progress, the Board needs to be aware of the situation.
- Recruitment and retention of staff has always been an issue. The department is currently fully staffed but most others are suffering as classes are being postponed due to the lack of interest in law enforcement.

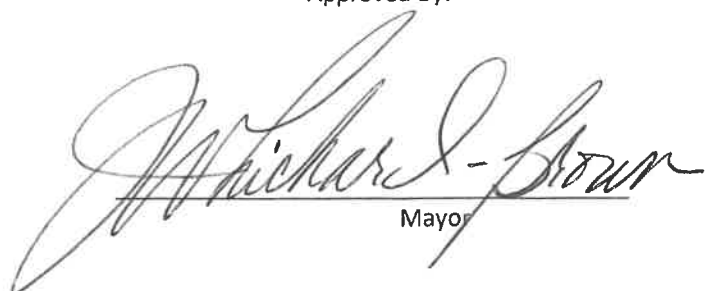
**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the Mayor declared the meeting adjourned at 5:13 p.m.

Submitted By:

Approved By:

  
Town Clerk

  
Mayor