

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

March 31, 2020

The Board of Commissioners of the Town of Williamston met in regular session on Tuesday, March 31, 2020 at 5:30 p.m. in the Assembly Room at Town Hall.

PRESENT Mayor Joyce Whichard-Brown
Commissioners: Mayor Pro Tem Ronell Rodgers, Al Chesson, Alton Moore, and Commissioner Jerry Knox. William Coffield was present via GoToMeeting application
Town Administrator: John O'Daniel
Town Clerk: Christina Craft
Town Attorney: Daniel Manning
Fire Chief: Michael Peaks

ABSENT None

The Town Clerk informed the Board the meeting is broadcasted live to the public through the use of the GoToMeeting application in an effort to maintain transparency to the public. Commissioner Coffield is the only participant that is not muted on the application during the meeting.

CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATION

The Mayor called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. Commissioner Moore led the pledge of allegiance. She requested a moment of silence for the Fire Captain. Commissioner Knox offered the invocation.

AGENDA APPROVED

The Mayor asked if there were any adjustments to the Regular Agenda or if the Board wished any items to be removed or added the Regular Agenda. The Town Administrator requested a text change under Old Business to change the description from Fire Engine to Ladder Truck Repair. *It was moved by Commissioner Chesson, seconded by Commissioner Knox, and unanimously passed to approve the regular agenda as amended.* Commissioner Rodgers expressed concern of postponing the entire agenda until after the corona virus pandemic is over. Commissioner Chesson reported the urgency of the meeting is the repairs needed on the ladder truck. The actions related to the budget may be discretionary. The Town Administrator reported a few items were moved from the April meeting schedule to receive input and the other items on the April meeting could be pushed to a later date. The staff does need direction on a few items regarding the Town's response to the COVID-19 virus. The Mayor requested a show of hands to move forward with the agenda as presented.

OLD BUSINESS

Approval of Ladder Truck Repair

The Fire Chief reported he is requesting ladder truck repairs in the amount of \$44,127 as the Town has only the one ladder truck which was purchased in 1999. On the latest inspection, it was found there is a corrosion issue on the truck. The warranty on the apparatus is for 20 years. The warranty does not cover damage from corrosion. A quote has been received 44,126.91. He reported there are six places on the base section of the ladder. The company will have to take the ladder apart by section. The repair company will remove the section of worst corrosion and weld a new section in its place. The ladder truck cannot be used in its full extent at this time. The truck is due for replacement per the Capital Improvement Plan in five years. It is dangerous to use on elevated areas without the repair. The Town Administrator reported a budget amendment would be brought before the Board at the next meeting if the Board approves the immediate repair. Commissioner Chesson was concerned how the ladder truck corroded as the vehicle is very well maintained and housed. The Fire Chief reported the truck is very well maintained with annual inspections and is washed and waxed regularly. He believes the corrosion was from the inside out. Commissioner Moore questioned if the truck had undercoating on it. The Fire Chief reported this is not an issue that is seen on a regular basis and is not aware if the vehicle was purchased with undercoating. *It was moved by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Knox, and unanimously passed to approve the ladder truck repair as requested.*

Approval of Board Travel Policy

The Town Administrator reported the board travel policy has been amended per Board's direction. The policy includes a form that will need to be completed to authorize the Town Clerk to register Board members for conferences and obtain hotel rooms. The Mayor reported the policy states no luxury accommodations are allowed. As far as conferences, she requested to be booked at the host hotel for conferences. The Town Administrator reported the host hotel is the first option for accommodations. The Mayor reported she has had to stay in places other than the host hotel which is unacceptable. The Town Clerk reported the host hotel is the first option but the blocked rooms for the event are limited and, if the blocked rooms are full, she makes reservations at other suggested hotels suggested by the event sponsors. Registrations are not done until requested by the member. The Mayor reported the second to the last paragraph of the policy lists employees. The Town Administrator reported he will change "employees" to read "elected officials." *It was moved by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Chesson, and unanimously passed to approve the Board Travel Policy as amended.*

Approval of Board Travel Budget

The Town Administrator reported the travel budget was brought before the Board at the January Board Retreat. Commissioner Moore suggested in a previous meeting to increase the budgeted amounts to \$1,500 per Board member. The presented budget incorporated the request which would begin in July 2020. While amounts were listed per conferences attended, the total amount per commissioner would be used to cover any local and away meetings the member chooses to attend regardless of what was listed on the budget presented. Commissioner Chesson stated the uncertainty of the times we are in. The Fed in St. Louis is projecting 32% unemployment for this year. The unemployment rate in the 2008 and 2009 recession was 12%. The Town was preparing to purchase the building beside the Piggly Wiggly for a public safety building and cancelled. We don't know how people will be able to pay their bills as unemployment letters are just now being distributed. The 15 water accounts that were cut back on in the emergency meeting Saturday night was at a cost of \$1,500. He recommends not adding anything further to the budget over the 2019/2020 amounts as the Town has current obligations for the renovation of the Fire Department, relocation of the Police Department and the Gaylord Perry Park improvements. Those amounts will still be a very hard budget to meet as the Town has not seen the seriousness of the situation. Commissioner Rodgers reported the loss of Park Dale industry and a decline in population has already affected the water rates and now people are unemployed. Commissioner Chesson reported the Board needs to give the staff some direction so staff will be able to present a balanced budget. The Mayor questioned if Commissioner Chesson was referring to other requests such as the Library, Arts Council and Williamston Boys and Girls Club. Commissioner Chesson reported he was referring to any increases in the upcoming budget over the amounts budgeted in 2019/2020 and wanted to other Board members to know why he plans to vote against any increases or additions. Commissioner Moore reported if the funds are in the budget and unused, the funds are still there. The Town Administrator reported all departments are required to stay within their budgets. If additional expenditures are noted, directors make special effort to decrease other spending in other line items to accommodate. Any funds unexpended are put into the emergency fund for emergencies like a pandemic or hurricane. Commissioner Moore reported there are funds made available to the town to assist in the pandemic. The Town Administrator reported there is a Cares Act but it appears to be designed for the larger populated towns. He reached out to Congressman Butterfield's office to see what options are available for Williamston. Commissioner Moore reported all water bills will still have to be paid. The Town Administrator was concerned if water accounts are allowed to go too many months, it will be very difficult for the customer to catch back up. The department heads work very hard as a team to keep expenses as low as possible. The Mayor requested a motion to accept the Board travel budget as presented. *Commissioner Chesson made a motion to keep the Board Travel Budget the same as 2019/2020, seconded by Commissioner Knox. The Town Administrator questioned if the motion refers to the gross amount and Commissioner Chesson confirmed it was for a gross amount. Commissioners Moore, Rodgers, Knox and Chesson voted in favor of maintain the same Board Travel Budget in 2020/2021 as is in place for 2019/2020. Commissioner Coffield voted against.*

Approval of Williamston Boys and Girls Club Budget Request

The Town Administrator reported the Williamston Boys and Girls Club did not submit their budget request by the deadline approved by the Board. The Mayor reported the Club claims they did send a request in but staff claims they did not. She questioned why the Club cannot submit a day late and the information was not submitted in the Board packets. The Town Administrator reported when anyone applies for a grant or funds, there is a deadline. Commissioner Chesson reported the Boys and Girls Club is a great organization and the Town needs to support it. Originally, the Town was requested to provide seed money for the three years. In their budget for 2020, there is a

\$42,000 excess in revenue over expenses. Their total current assets are \$3.4 million in current assets over liabilities. They have almost a \$700,000 increase in cash for the year. The Boys and Girls Club are doing fine. He recommended keeping the same \$15,000 allocation or even a modest decrease which is concurrent with the previous suggestion to remain at the current level for all organizations across the board. *It was moved by Commissioner Chesson, seconded by Commissioner Moore, and unanimously passed to approve \$15,000 allocation for the Williamston Boys and Girls Club.* Discussions continued regarding other organizations that requested funds. The Town Administrator reported the Historical Society requested a reduced amount of \$1,000. The Martin Memorial Library requested the same amount and will be budgeted at \$102,000. The Martin County Arts Council requested an increase but plan to budget the same amount as previous year of \$7,000. The Martin County Chamber of Commerce was a new request of \$2,500 and our plan is to budget their full request.

NEW BUSINESS

Approval of Offer to Purchase 118 Pearl Street

The Town Administrator reported the Town received an offer to purchase 118 Pearl Street. Per Board direction, the bid was accepted and, per General Statute, the bid was advertised to allow for upset bids. No upset bid was received. The Town Attorney advised the Board to accept the bid subject to the bidder making payment of the 2019/2020 taxes if the transaction is completed prior to July 1, 2020. *It was moved by Commissioner Knox, seconded by Commissioner Chesson and unanimously passed to approve to accept offer to purchase the property at 118 Pearl Street for \$1,500 subject to the buyer paying the 2019/2020 taxes.*

Consideration of Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Grant

The Town Administrator reported the Parks and Recreation Director has found a LWCF grant that may help fund the Gaylord Perry Park renovation. This grant can be used towards the Town's match requirement in the PARTF grant. He is requesting Board approval to apply for the grant and to designate the Mayor, the Park and Recreation Director and Town Administrator to represent the Town. *It was moved by Commissioner Chesson, seconded by Commissioner Moore and unanimously passed to apply for the LWCF grant and to designate the Mayor, Parks and Recreation Director and Town Administrator to represent the Town in this transaction.*

Discussion of Town Operations in the COVID-19 Response

The Town Administrator reported there are two COVID-positive individuals in Martin County. Currently, the Town has closed all Town-owned buildings to the public. It is a concern how to continue with current operations and maintain the safety of staff and citizens. The first plan is to send all nonessential staff home without pay which is not an optimal option. The second option is to send all nonessential staff home with pay which will cause morale issues. The third plan is to split the employees in two teams. One team will work one week, then be home a week with pay. If someone in a team contracts the virus, the entire staff will not be exposed. Staff would remain available if called upon on their week home for emergencies. The Fire and Police departments are the most challenging with splitting in teams. The Town Administrator recommends the last option. He and the Finance Officer are considering doing something extra for the first responders as they cannot stay home. The greater issue is if our entire staff is exposed, there is little hope for outside help as other agencies have the same issue is nationwide. He requested Board approval for the 50% staffing and to give him the discretion to make further changes if things get worse without having to request a Board meeting. The top priorities are the essential services such as police, fire/rescue, and water/sewer services. He requested the Mayor and Board communicate with staff solely through email and phone to reduce possible exposure. Commissioner Rodgers questioned the stress level of staff. The Town Administrator reported many staff members have small children in the home and are concerned of carrying the virus to their loved ones. Commissioner Moore questioned how the community will be advised on services that are to be reduced. The Town Administrator reported all changes are being posted on the website, Facebook and the Enterprise. Commissioner Chesson thanked the staff for the updates on Facebook as they have been well received. Commissioner Moore questioned if the Mayor will be kept in close communications about any changes. The Town Administrator reported he plans to keep the Mayor and entire board abreast of changes so all the Board is aware if questioned by citizens. The Town Administrator reported some agencies have stopped accepting cash payments. Our staff has been supplied with gloves and hand-sanitizer. Commissioner Rodgers questioned if the police department will enforce the governor's 5 o'clock rule. The Town Administrator reported the Police Department will continue to enforce the laws the best to their ability. Commissioner Chesson reported citizens are still allowed to shop for necessities while the stores are open. Even the National Guard does not have the manpower to stop and question everyone. The Mayor questioned if the Town is giving staff letters to prove why they are out. The Town

Board of Commissioner's Meeting

March 31, 2020

Page 4

Administrator reported staff will use their ID badges. Commissioner Moore questioned the line item on his personal water bill for the Water Authority. The Town Clerk reported the bill was broken down in detail to help citizens understand the makeup of the monthly bill. The Water Authority is the amount charged by the Martin County Regional Water Authority which is where the Town purchases the water provided. Commissioner Moore reported Hamilton offers a level billing and auto-drafts for monthly payments. The Town Administrator reported Hamilton does not purchase the water from the Water Authority but has a well which makes it easier for them to allow that as the Town of Williamston has to purchase 100% of water used. Commissioner Moore questioned if the Town changed the length of time citizens were allowed to pay. The Town Administrator stated it was changed years ago to cut off for nonpayment after being one-month delinquent from two-month delinquent. The Governor issued an executive order today restricting all organizations providing utilities to not suspend any services for nonpayment, no late fees are to be charged and reasonable repayment plans are to be offered at the end of the order which was stated for the next 60 days. *Commission Chesson made a motion to approve the 50% staffing plan as presented and to authorize the Town Administrator to work with Department Heads to make changes as warranted during the duration of the COVID-19 outbreak.*

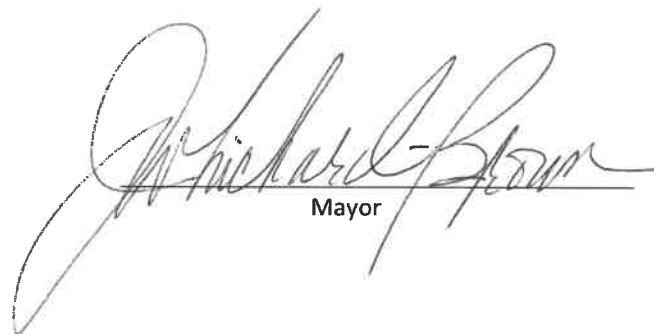
ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the Mayor declared the meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Submitted By:

Approved By:


Town Clerk


Mayor