

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

January 24, 2020

The Board of Commissioners of the Town of Williamston met in regular session for a Budget Retreat on Friday, January 24, 2020 at 10:05 a.m. in the Assembly Room at Town Hall.

**PRESENT** Mayor: Joyce Whichard-Brown  
Commissioners: Mayor Pro Tem Ronell Rodgers, Al Chesson, 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  
Fire Chief: Michael Peaks  
Public Works Director: Kerry Spivey  
Human Resources Administrator: Martha-Brown Lilley

**ABSENT** Commissioner Jerry Knox

**CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATION**

The Mayor called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone.

**COMPLETION OF REQUIRED ETHICS TRAINING**

All Board members present, plus the Town Administrator and Public Works director watched the required Ethics Training webinar provided by the UNC School of Government.

**FINANCIAL OVERVIEW**

The Town Administrator reviewed the Vision Statement. A financial dashboard for the last year was presented. Commissioner Rodgers questioned why there were just percentages and not actual totals in the graphs. The Town Administrator reported the graphs were more of a visual review of the information provided by the auditor. There was more budgeted in fund balance than was actually spent. The overage was due to the delayed purchase of a street sweeper. The Board had approved a street sweeper purchase in the current year. This was delayed as the staff felt the purchase could be postponed for one more year. A six-month financial dashboard was presented. While the Board may not be able to add funds to the fund balance this year but as long as expenses are kept in line, the Town will continue to be in good shape through the end of this fiscal year. Commissioner Moore questioned the property taxes collection rate. The Finance Director reported there are multiple larger businesses that did not pay taxes in December and has lowered the collection score to 92%. She is confident the collections will catch back up in the first of this year. She reported that anytime Code Enforcement action has been taken and the owner does not pay, such as when a dilapidated property is demolished, the cost is added to the taxes which affects her collection score. It is a plan to start the collection process earlier this year which will help the collection score.

The Finance Director reviewed the historical analysis of the General Fund Balance. In 2009, the fund balance had dropped to 9.8%. While the Town has increased the amount over the next decade, some fund balance was used last year to pay off police car debt and to keep from borrowing for this year's budgeted police car purchase which will help moving forward. Not only will this remove debt payments, but will also save in interest expenses for the next three years. Previous auditor had stated the fund balance should not drop below 55%. Current financial debt commitments are \$295,710 in the General Fund; \$847,730 in the Enterprise Fund; and \$39,326 in Storm Water Fund. Commissioner Rodgers questioned how the Town is able to add funds with the population decrease. The Town Administrator reported the departments have made many cuts and are very conservative with funds. Commissioner Chesson reported the annexation has helped to increase revenues. That was the last annexation done in North Carolina.

The Town Administrator reported the effects of utility bill collection and billing policy. The Accounts Receivable is steadily increasing. The Board may need to consider increasing the deposit that is required for accounts. The deposit is \$175 for renters and no deposit required for home owners. The Finance Director reported the current deposit is

## Board of Commissioner's Budget Retreat Meeting

January 24, 2020

Page 2

adequate for most cases but some exceed what the deposit will cover. The Town Administrator reported the rate should not be raised so high that it is a huge burden but an increase may be needed for new accounts. The late fee is charged the day before the water account is cut off for nonpayment. The only month that an exception to the cutoff date is during the Christmas holiday. Commissioner Chesson questioned if a proposal will be brought to the Board for recommendation.

The Human Resource Administrator reported this is the second year with the NC League Insurance. The agreement was there would be a cap of 8% premium increase in the second year. The upcoming budget year cost will be based on the Town's loss ratio. She has had very few complaints from staff with the current health insurance. OPEB liability graph shows the OPEB liability per the Actuarial Study of \$4,455,462. The Town's contribution amount at this time is \$836,691. The Town did not join the State Health Plan as the retirees would not be able to stay on the Town's health insurance plan.

The Town Administrator reviewed the aging vehicles and equipment hours per department. 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.

The Town Administrator reviewed the Capital Improvement requests for Budget year. Current requests total \$8,421,989. Planning has requested a Code Enforcement vehicle. The current Code Enforcer utilizes his personal vehicle which will no longer be available when he is no longer an employee. The PARTF grant is listed under the Parks and Recreation for the Gaylord Perry Park renovation. The street sweeper is included in the upcoming year. It was approved for purchase in the current year but Public Works was able to extend the life of the vehicle for an additional year.

Multiple people have questioned the high cost of the insurance. A tier system was established at the direction of the Board to assist employees with the high deductible. When the Town reimburses the employee, all reimbursed funds are deposited into an employee's HSA account. In the past, there has been confusion with the IRS calendar year and maximum contributions conflicting with the Town's fiscal year. The Town had a policy of not allowing employee contributions and reimbursements to exceed the IRS maximum for a given IRS calendar in an effort to protect the employee. In an effort to simplify the process and maximize the benefit for our employee, he requested a change to current practice allowing the deposit the remaining reimbursement funds into the HSA the first quarter of the following year if the reimbursement would result in excess contributions above the IRS limit in the second half of a calendar year. If there is no other reasonable option to reimburse HSA funds with an HSA deposit, the Town will issue the remaining funds to the employee through payroll and this amount will be added to the income line on their w-2. It will be the employee's responsibility to handle the additional revenue and make sure it is filed on their taxes correctly. He does not want to penalize the employee for participating in a program encouraged by the Town. The HSA reimbursement is currently under review by the Town Attorney. The consensus of the Board is to make the change effective in the current fiscal year.

The monthly paid claims summary shows a medical loss ratio of 118.4% for the year. He explained the loss ratio as the Town would pay in \$100 in premiums, the insurance company is incurring a cost of \$118 and is losing money. The Human Resource Administrator touched on this earlier in the health insurance cost overview which is why the Town is expecting an increase in premiums.

The Town Administrator presented a holiday schedule with a comparison to the state and county schedule. Changes mid-year to the holiday schedule makes it difficult to control salary cost. Anytime Town Hall is closed for days not on the list, the departmental salary budgets are affected. While Town Hall can close without issue, there is an added cost in the departments such as Fire, Police and Public Works as they will be paid for working and holiday pay. He requested any changes that need to be made at the retreat. The Mayor requested the addition of Veteran's Day to the paid holidays. Commissioner Coffield agreed but questioned the Christmas holiday with three paid days. The Town Administrator explained the Christmas holiday will only have a third day off when Christmas day falls on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. Christmas falls on a Friday this year so there will only be two paid days for the Christmas holiday. The Town Administrator questioned if the Board would want to close early for Thanksgiving. Commissioner Chesson reported the Town is a public business. It was the consensus of the Board to approve the holiday schedule as presented with the addition of Veteran's Day as a paid holiday.

## DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

### Public Works

The Public Works Director provided the following report:

- The Ravo Street Sweeper is being considered for the replacement street sweeper. The current sweeper was due for replacement in the current year. He is concerned with extending the purchase too much further as the equipment is beyond its useful life and it will take months to receive the replacement. When the current machine is sold, the sweeper portion may be worn out but it is attached to a heavy-duty truck. The Ravo street sweeper is smaller with better visibility and appears to be more functional. The salesman stated he would allow the Town to use one on a trial basis. He allowed the town's operator to test drive. The machine turns on a dime. It is a simple vacuum operation.
- As the wood chipper continues to age, it is more sustainable to move from chipping to burning of yard wastes with a fire box air curtain burner and continue to avoid landfill tipping fees. The \$86,000 chipper paid for itself within two to two and a half years. The chipper would be sold on GovDeals. He feels the curtain burner is a good investment for the Town. Only limbs and no loose leaves can be burned in the proposed burner. Leaves are composted and the landfill will accept it free of charge.
- The Blue Frog Aerators are still under consideration at the sewer plant. The estimated savings per pond utilizing the Blue Frog Aerator is \$65,054 for both lagoons. These numbers are estimates as it is uncertain how many hours they will average each day once installed. Tarboro has installed the Blue Frog Aerators in their plant. He is watching them closely as the design is fairly new. Commissioner Coffield questioned how often the sludge is removed in each lagoon. The Public Works Director stated the cost is \$30,000 for one sludge removal done annually.
- Meter reading may need to move toward tablets on the trucks instead of the handheld devices. Current handheld devices will become obsolete in the coming years. He is evaluating methods of meter reading.
- The Woodlawn Cemetery has no additional available spaces and are now moving over to the new section on the opposite side of Martin Luther King Jr. Drive which is across from the Perry Park.

### Fire/Rescue

The Fire Chief provided the following report:

- EMS/Fire calls were 2,831, which is an increase of 199 calls from 2018. Second calls increase to 170. Second calls are handled by other staff to include the Fire Prevention Officer and the Administrative Assistant. Hours without a second call team is down by 1,128 from the previous year. This is due to volunteer support.
- 100% of the 508 hydrants have been inspected which was one of the goals with the addition of the Fire Prevention Officer. He has completed 65 pre-incident surveys which will save time during an actual emergency.
- 47 smoke alarms have been installed. 2019 was an unfortunate year with the loss of two citizens due to house fire. The department has reapplied for the grant and will receive 52 smoke alarms.
- 24 child restraint seats have been checked.
- 100% of scheduled properties have been inspected.
- A 30-year call volume shows a steady increase in call volumes. The age range of the largest portion of the patient calls is between the ages of 45 to 85+. The top age range for largest portion of the calls are the 65 to 74 age group.
- In January 2025, the current radios used by the Fire Department will be obsolete. He is hopeful for a grant to cover the expense
- The next truck in the Capital Improvement Plan is an EMS unit. In the past, funds have been saved by remounting the ambulances. It is rumored Ford plans to discontinue this model.
- The Fire Prevention Officer performs a flow test on every 5<sup>th</sup> hydrant inspected. A new procedure implemented this year is to paint the cap of the fire hydrant after the flow test. The color of the cap will correlate with the level of flow. There will also be reflective tape placed on the fire hydrant to increase visibility. He has also received permission from the NCDOT to install reflectors on the road to mark the location of fire hydrants that are partially hidden. All of these implementations will increase the response time.
- The RRT contract is due for renewal this year. Once the Town Attorney reviews, he will bring to the Board for approval.

### 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.
- The only Capital Improvement Plan request for the department is the continuation of the vehicle replacement cycle.
- There has been a reduction in crime in Williamston.
- The VIPER system is moving into stage 2. The State Highway Patrol switched to a VIPER radio system and allowed local emergency providers to join which allowed for interoperability between levels of emergency providers. E911 funds were only used to provide handheld devices which allowed the Town to move into the VIPER network and eliminate the cost of maintaining our own system. The Fire Department was also able to receive a grant to pay for the radios for their department. There was no cost to the town to join the system. One issue with the current radio is the radios do not work properly in buildings such as Walmart. Patches were purchased and businesses installed the appropriate equipment to aid the communication. The current radios will no longer work on the system in January 2025. The newer radio will have the capability of utilizing WIFI. The new radio needed for the cars will be added to newly purchased cars as part of the car replacement cycle. In the past, the older radios were removed from the old vehicle and installed to the new vehicle. The total cost for handhelds and installed radio for the patrol cars will be approximately \$160,000. The Sheriff's Association has contacted representatives to hopefully be able to use E911 funds for a one-time purchase. Some of these things will be budgeted incrementally instead of trying to install all of the radios at one time. This information is shared to make the Board aware of the upcoming change.
- Staff retention and recruitment is an ongoing issue. Other law enforcement agencies have the same issues and have increased the pay to recruit and retain staff. The Human Resource Administrator reported the pay study did increase salaries some. The extra recruitment position approved by the Board has helped briefly on a couple of occasions. When OPEB was restricted to only staff hired before July 2013, this was one recruiting/retention asset that was no longer offered to new hires. The police retirement will follow the officer from agency to agency. The Town's prior OPEB benefit encouraged staff to stay as that benefit did not follow the officer to a new job. The Mayor questioned how other agencies are able to get police officers. The Police Chief reported it is like everyone is throwing money at the issue.

### Planning

The Town Planner and Zoning Administrator reported:

- Twenty new businesses opened in Williamston in 2019. The two mobile food vendors, Y'all Eat Yet? And Bill's Hotdog, have been well received in the community. Four of the new businesses were located in the downtown district. Two downtown businesses closed. Net jobs created in the downtown district resulted in 1, full time and 3 part time jobs.
- Downtown investments totaled \$15,850.
- Problem area for coding issues. The four buildings marked with a star are in demolition process. There are two areas that are the primary focus as the largest amount of dilapidated properties. Commissioner Coffield questioned housing that is deteriorated and occupied. The Planner and Zoning Administrator reported the building inspector would get involved in those situations. The Town can send letters and the County could condemn the property based on the building inspector's findings. He presented a violations report. The majority of the violations were vegetative issues. There were five structures demolished in town.
- Of the six façade grants that were approved in 2019, Manson Mortuary and the Marin County Arts Council have completed their facades.
- The Town has been recertified by the Audubon Community.
- He presented a 5-year Downtown Plan which includes the Mitchell building demolition, new police department, pressure washing sidewalks, refurbish the triangle fountain statute, new benches, new banners, and new trashcans. There will be a Streetscape project that will include reworking the 8 planters along Main Street, replace the trees, evaluate street parking and sidewalk improvements.
- The Comprehensive Plan should be completed at the next Board meeting.

- All of the Board was invited to the Marketing Presentation on February 27<sup>th</sup> at 3 pm at the Martin Community College auditorium.
- The Patriot House rumor that the building has been sold is incorrect. Per the owner, she has a contractor interested in completing the renovations.
- There is someone interested in purchasing the Bowen Sign building.
- He is working on an outdoor dining ordinance that will be brought before the Board for consideration soon.
- Commissioner Rodgers questioned the progress with the Magnuson hotel. The Planner and Zoning Administrator reported the property owner can not be found. There is rubbish still on the property that can be carried to the landfill. He is concerned about the budgeted funds and wants to be certain there are funds to handle the scheduled demolitions. Commissioner Chesson reported Bob Clark pointed out the Town has an image problem. The hotel is in a central area and needs to be cleaned up. These areas need to be cleaned up before anyone will want to invest in the downtown area. The Town has to get the Town more business friendly. Commissioner Chesson questioned the Board if any others want a budget to move towards cleaning these areas. The goodwill and perception are everything. This is a conversation the Town shouldn't have to have over private property. He would like to see some projections to see how we can make something happen this spring. The Planner and Zoning Administrator reported the high visibility areas are really hurting the town.

#### **Parks & Recreation**

The Parks & Recreation director reported the following:

- The department has had lots of turnover in the last few months.
- There has been a steady reduction in numbers in the athletics portion which makes travel games more important to have other teams to play against. He believes this is a trend that will continue.
- The Godwin Coppage Park concession stand is being operated through the softball league association. He has noticed a decrease in those participants. He is considering options in the event that the association no longer continues. It is not his intention to staff the concession stand but would consider a partnership.
- Travel tournaments began in 2008. The numbers dropped off in 2018. With a decrease in teams, there were no tournaments for a few years. Last year, he began working with Top Gun and have tournaments scheduled. Another group requested the use of Williamston park for a tournament and used it in August. There are 13 tournaments on the 2020 calendar. While all the tournaments may not make it, utilizing three tournament groups will hopefully increase the usage. Tournaments bring people who spend money in the Town.
- The Land Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant is a federal grant is accepting grants until July for eligible LWCF sites. The LWCF will match up to 50%. He will have to review the original LWCF grant to see what is eligible. It will not cover new construction. He will continue to research the grant.

#### **BUDGET DISCUSSION**

##### **Street Drainage Update**

The Town Administrator reported the storm water drainage near the primary school. The NCDOT is currently reviewing the issue.

##### **Police/Fire/PARTF Projects**

The Town Administrator presented a timeline for the Police and Fire department projects. The construction contracts will be presented to the Board at the February meeting. The LGC will hopefully approve the project financing on February 4<sup>th</sup>. R. S. Stalls has 45 days to vacate the building once the Town moves forward with the purchase of the building. He is hoping to have a ground-breaking ceremony in March for the Fire Department and April for the Police Department.

##### **Gaylord Perry Park Air Conditioning**

The Town Administrator reported he has received quotes for the Board to review regarding the Gaylord Perry Park Air Conditioning. He presented a quote of \$26,500 that will be needed to rewire the building before air conditioning can be installed. The actual air conditioning unit to include ductwork is estimated at \$49,625. Per Brabble Insulation,

additional insulation will be costly and would not save enough in energy costs to warrant the investment. The Parks and Recreation Director reported the energy bill for the park is approximately \$600 per month in the summer. Commissioner Chesson reported the electric bill will triple with the installation of an air conditioner. The Town Administrator reported he found a CDBG-Neighborhood Revitalization grant that will fund the air conditioner. It will also help support an existing community with dilapidated housing. The owners would not have to pay back any funds if they continue to live in the home for a period of time. He is hopeful the grant will reopen for applications soon. Commissioner Moore questioned if the Board was considering installing the air conditioning in the gymnasium. The Town Administrator recommended the Board wait on the air conditioning until grant funding can be obtained. Commissioner Chesson reported he would be willing to move forward with the air conditioning if a grant was obtained as the Board has already approved a \$500,000 renovation to the park. The Town Administrator reported adding any further expenses at this time as the Town has three large projects that will have a major impact on the budget for the next few years. The Parks and Recreation Director reported there was a big difference in the original quote and the current quote for the purchase of the actual air conditioner. The first quote did not have ductwork and the return location was questionable. The second quote has a ductwork and a different placement for the return.

#### **Annexation Street Lighting**

The Town Administrator reported citizens from the Annexation area in Cedar Hill have requested street lighting. The Town Attorney reported the statute of limitations has expired. Dominion had unsuccessfully attempted to get easements to install the lighting in the area. The Town Administrator recommended attempting to get the easements. The lighting in the area would cost approximately \$30,000. Commissioner Chesson reported the Town owes it to the Cedar Hill area to attempt to get the lighting for the citizens. Public Works Director advised the Board to report any nonworking lights to the Public Works Department as they coordinate the repair with Dominion.

#### **Assembly Room Audio**

The Town Administrator presented a quote for a small portable audio system which has four microphones. He recommends this purchase as citizens have complained about difficulty hearing the Board discussion. The Mayor reported the \$1300 quote was too cheap. The Town Clerk reported three microphones will be placed by the Board and one at the podium. It was the consensus of the Board to add a sound system to the budget for the upcoming year. The Mayor offered to allow the Town to use her personal sound system until one is purchased.

#### **Board Travel**

The Town Administrator presented a Board Training and Travel Budget to the Board for consideration. In year's past, the Board travel was incorporated in the Administration Budget. The budget amounts have been separated to allow each Commissioner the same amount which will allow each of the members to attend one conference. The Mayor's amount is slightly higher to cover cost to attend local meetings. This will allow each to know the amount they have allocated to spend each year. Commissioner Coffield questioned if funds could be borrowed from another commissioner who doesn't use their travel allotment. The Town Administrator did not anticipate any issues as long as the other commissioner agrees. The funding can be used on one-day training through the School of Government. The Town Administrator reported this will be added to the budget if the Board approves. The travel budget presented is for the upcoming budget year. Commissioner Rodgers questioned if there was a Board Travel and Training Budget in the past. The Town Administrator reported there has been but it was not broken down per Commissioner. When the budgeted line item is exhausted and another requests to go to a conference, the expenditure has to be brought back to the Board to increase the budgeted line item.

The Town Administrator presented an Elected Officials Travel Authorization form and policy for the Board's consideration. The Travel Authorization form is the form that is required for all staff to travel. The Travel Policy was based on a policy from Fayetteville. Commissioner Rodgers questioned who determined that this is the policy for the Board. The Town Administrator reported the policy is being proposed for the Board's review. Commissioner Rodgers reported there needs to be discussion as the amount and the policy hasn't been discussed. The policy needs to be discussed as it appears the policy and amount has been determined. The Finance Director reported the policy

presented is something to review. All staff have a similar policy and travel request to complete. It makes it easier for accounting purposes. The Town Administrator reported the policy is new and presented for discussion. Commissioner Moore questioned the tips and gratuities when meals were not included. The Town Administrator reported that item should have been removed. The monthly stipend given to Board members was increased in the past to cover those costs. Commissioner Rodgers disagreed with providing written reports to the City Council summarizing information received at conferences as no one does this. Every Board member has the opportunity to attend any conference and not understanding providing a written report. The Town Administrator reported some materials may help educate the rest of the board. A verbal report should be fine. The Mayor reported all six have the right to go to meeting and not sure why we would be required to bring back information to those who chose not to go. The Finance Director stated other staff bring back information to help other staff members. Commissioner Chesson reported the purpose of attending is to benefit the town, staff and Board to grow educationally. A verbal sharing of ideas and a handout could prove beneficial. Commissioner Rodgers reported he went to meet with US Senator Thom Tillis and there was no discussion. The Mayor questioned if an answer was needed tonight or could the discussion continue in the February meeting. The Town Administrator reported he will add the policy to the February meeting agenda.

#### **1-Way and 2-way Street Discussion**

The Town Administrator reported, per Board direction, the Town Planner and Zoning Administrator requested the change of the one-way streets back to two-way streets. The NCDOT has recommended changes to ensure the change can be done safely. The parking at the intersection of Washington and Elm Streets would have to be restricted to meet the required stopping sight distance of 250 feet. The NCDOT also proposed the elimination of curb cut on West Main Street which will eliminate one exit from the R. S. Stalls building. Commissioner Chesson reported there will be push back from the property owners with the loss of the parking places. He also recommended the NCDOT regrade the intersection as there is a big dip in the same area where the public access to the Stalls parking lot. The Police Chief reported if the driveway is eliminated, the only other access directly to Main Street will be through the neighbor's driveway. Commissioner Moore reported the area is a congested area by Griffin Quick Lunch. The Police Chief reported people will go the wrong direction in that area often.

#### **Social Media**

The Town Administrator reported the need for software to capture comments on the Town's social media accounts in order to be able to respond to future public record requests. It was the consensus of the Board to move forward with the social media software at the annual fee of \$2,388.

#### **Utility Bill Fee**

The Town Administrator requested the Board's consideration of a \$5 late fee for water bill payments made after the due date. This is in addition to the \$25 fee assessed the day before the water is cut off due to nonpayment. He has researched other towns and this is a standard fee apply. It was the consensus of the Board to apply the \$5 fee to begin in July but the change must be broadcasted ahead of time. The Finance Director reported the information can be posted on the bill and website. It is free to the citizens to use an automatic bank draft. There is a fee charged by Point and Pay to use a credit card. The Town does not receive any extra funds if someone pays with a credit card.

#### **MCRWASA**

The Town Administrator made the Board aware that MCRWASA has plans to increase the water cost by \$.13 per thousand gallons. With the proposed increase, the Board may consider increasing the water rates in the upcoming year.

#### **Roof for 108 West Main Street**

The Town Administrator reported the need of a roof for the Town-owned building located at 108 West Main Street. Commissioner Chesson reported the building will need to be torn down if a new roof is not installed. He proposed replacing the roof and other improvements to make the building marketable. It is unsafe to use the stairs. Improvements need to be made to sell the building as a shell building. He suggested to sell the building to the

Board of Commissioner's Budget Retreat Meeting

January 24, 2020

Page 8

Williamston Downtown Inc. to allow them to market the building to interested businesses. The Town Administrator presented a quote in the amount of \$33,500. Commissioner Coffield questioned if the Town had the funds to do the roof in the current year. The Town Administrator reported the funds would have to come out of Fund Balance. The Finance Director reported a budget amendment would be done. It was the consensus of the Board to send out for RFP (Request for Proposals) for the roof.

**18-Wheeler Parking Request**

The Town Administrator reported a request was made to park 18-wheelers on Town-owned property. Commissioner Chesson reported the liability was too high.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the Mayor declared the meeting adjourned at 5:05 p.m.

Submitted By:

Approved By:

---

Town Clerk

---

Mayor