

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

April 12, 2021

The Board of Commissioners of the Town of Williamston met in a special session (budget workshop) on Monday, April 12, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. in the Town Hall Assembly Room, 102 East Main Street, Williamston, NC.

**PRESENT** Mayor Joyce Whichard-Brown  
Commissioners: Mayor Pro Tem Ronell Rodgers, Jerry Knox, Alton Moore, Al Chesson, and William Coffield  
Town Administrator: Christina Craft, Interim  
Town Clerk: Jessica Godard  
Finance Officer: Linda Harrison  
Police Chief: Travis Cowan  
Fire Chief Michael Peaks  
Recreation Director: Allen Overby

**ABSENT** Public Works Director: Kerry Spivey  
Planner and Zoning Administrator: Cameron Braddy

**CALL TO ORDER AND INVOCATION**

The Mayor called the meeting to order. Commissioner Moore led the pledge of allegiance. Commissioner Knox offered the invocation, after a moment of silence for the various events occurring in our country.

**AGENDA APPROVED**

The Mayor asked if there were any adjustments to the meeting Agenda or if the Board wished any items to be removed or added to the Agenda. *It was moved by Commissioner Moore, seconded by Commissioner Rodgers, and unanimously passed to approve the agenda as presented.*

**BUDGET WORKSHOP**

The Interim Town Administrator stated she and the Finance Director worked hard to present a balanced budget to the Board of Commissioners. The total budget was \$10,967, 970. Some items of note were discussed. There was a 2% COLA increase for all employees, which continues the goal of strengthening salary competitiveness. The budget also included a ½% merit increase. There would be no increase in the property tax rate (\$0.89), and no increase in water/sewer rates/storm water. There were some increases that would affect all departments. There was a health insurance increase – Medcost increased premiums by 19%, which equaled approximately a \$116,711 increase. Worker’s compensation insurance increased by 6% (\$5,571). There was a projected 10% increase for Property and liability insurance (\$5,886). Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) received contributions each year. There would be a \$100,000 transfer to the OPEB trust fund in the current budget, so there was no OPEB in the 2021-2022 budget.

The Interim Town Administrator discussed budgeted positions. The Town (Fire/EMS) applied for a grant for 2 positions for EMS/Fire, but that was not included in the budget as the grant had not yet been awarded. The grant would cover the first three years’ salaries; the Town would be responsible for the salaries beginning year four. Due to a higher turnover rate in some departments, budgeted salaries were reduced. This was only the budgeted amount and did not eliminate any positions in the departments. Those reductions included a 1.5 position reduction for the police department, a 1 position reduction in the sanitation department, and 1 position plus a reduction in overtime for Parks & Recreation. Commissioner Moore asked if the reduction would decrease the number of employees. The Town Administrator stated no positions were being cut, only the amount of salaries. The Town Administrator stated the Police Department was fully staff at this time, and if that continued there would be a chance a budget amendment would be needed towards the end of the year. That process had been done for quite a few years, and there had only been one year a budget amendment was done but was not needed. Commissioner Moore asked why money wouldn’t be in the budget all the time. The Finance Director stated there was not enough revenue to cover that, so cuts were made elsewhere due to the turnover.

Commissioner Rodgers asked if there were any special guidelines for transferring money out of the enterprise funds. The Finance Director stated the transfers were based on employees paid from the general fund that also did work for water/sewer (Human Resources, Utility Clerk, etc.). Instead of moving the money out each pay period, a journal entry was done once a month for enterprise fund transfer. Funds were only transferred from the enterprise fund to cover funds related to tasks related to the enterprise fund only. The transfer should be seen as an expense that belongs to the enterprise fund. The method used was approved by the auditors.

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Next, the Town Administrator reviewed the Administrative department items. There was a transfer from the enterprise fund of \$689,576. This was the amount of salary and benefit costs staff identified that should be charged to the enterprise fund and those employees were totally paid out of general fund (Finance Officer, Administrator, etc. whose duties are both in the general fund and enterprise fund).

In the planning department, the code enforcement vehicle purchase was removed in order to balance the budget. Staff was considering the option of retaining one of the patrol cars that was due to be rotated out. Those vehicles were historically sold on the GovDeals auction site. The Code Enforcement department needed a dedicated vehicle to inspect properties. Police Chief Cowan stated there was a detective car that was due to be rotated out and it could be used by Code Enforcement, if approved by the Board. The code enforcement officer would only be utilizing the vehicle within city limits.

For public buildings, there was nothing in the line item for capital outlay. The police department project should be complete in the 2021 year. All transfers from the general fund to the project had been made. The Fire department should also be complete in the 2021 year. All contributions from the general fund had been made.

For the police department, the purchase of 2 patrol cars was planned. The purchase was planned with operating funds. The patrol cars were on a rotation cycle.

RRT was funded by the state of North Carolina in the amount of \$69,000. There were no changes in RRT revenue and expenditures, as those funds were restricted.

For the Street department, it was noted that funds for this came from Powell Bill and the \$25 license plate fee. For Powell bill funds - the last \$120,000 debt payment for the annexation streets was in the budget. The first 3 payments for the street sweeper (\$78,475) was also included in the budget. Also included was a \$25,000 paving project proposed under capital outlay (Powell Bill project). No use of the Powell Bill fund balance was anticipated for the 2022 budget, unless the Board wanted to increase the project amount. It was recommended if any increases were needed later in the year to do a budget amendment. The annual loan payments for the annexation area started in October 2020 would be complete in 2022. The revenue from the \$25 license plate fee could only be used towards street improvements and had provided additional funds to assist with street improvements. The \$25 fee was linked to the annual loan payments for the annexation area. When the loan was paid in full in 2022, the funds could be allocated towards specific future projects.

Sanitation – one position reduced in salaries to balance the budget.

Parks and Recreation – there was one capital project listed, which was for a concrete slab under bleachers. There was a vehicle requested but it was not budgeted. One position was reduced in salaries to balance the budget, and overtime was reduced. There was a project to begin in the 2021-2022 year, which was re-doing one of the parks. The LWCF grant should hopefully be received by Memorial Day 2021. Director Overby stated the state was preparing to submit recommendations to the National Park Service.

Cultural – There were no increases in the budget for Martin Memorial Library, Martin County Arts Council, or the Martin County Historical Society.

Debt – 2021-2022 will have debt payments for the Fire Engine and EMS Ambulance

Economic and Physical Development -- The Boys & Girls Club requested \$20,000, which was \$5,000 more than their normal allocation. Staff recommended keeping that allocation at \$15,000. The Boys & Girls Club had not yet requested payment for the 2020-2021 year as of yet. Those organizations were responsible for sending a formal letter of request for allocation distributions, for purposes of providing for auditors.

Water and Sewer – no increase in water/sewer bills to customers. The Waste Water Treatment Plant loan would be paid off in the 2020-2021 year. There was a pickup truck requested, but that was moved to the 2022-2023 year, to balance the budget. The payment to MCRWASA would be \$1,170,733 in the 2021-2022 year (a \$20,026 reduction from the previous year). Commissioner Chesson stated MCRWASA was running a balanced budget with no retained earnings, meaning there was no sinking fund in case anything happened. He recommended at some point putting some money away for future problems.

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The debt payments for the Police and Fire Departments were mentioned. \$77,988 for Fire Department, \$88,157 for the Police Department, 2 payments for EMS remount, and 3<sup>rd</sup> year payment out of 65 for the Fire Truck.

Next, the Town Administrator reviewed the general fund revenues, as listed in the handouts provided to the Board. She then discussed the ABC distribution, stating staff estimated those revenues when preparing the budget. The amount of funds received by the County for the Rescue Squad and Recreation were estimated based on previous allocations. Chief Peaks stated the rescue revenues may change to balance the budget on the county level. The Town Administrator noted a blank amount next to the "Undesignated Air Conditioner" line due to waiting for the grant funds from the CDBG-NR grant. Commissioner Moore asked why the project would take so long since the Town has the contract. The Town Administrator stated the next step was getting a grant administrator in place, and there was a process. \$100,000 was received with the grant to do the air conditioning project. Commissioner Moore asked what was anticipated for a grant administrator to be paid, and whether the Town would be responsible for paying the grant administrator. The Town Administrator stated she would look at the contract and find out that information. The Town Administrator stated the RFP had been put out and there would be bids to review at the next meeting. Commissioner Chesson stated an administrator was always used, to handle the paperwork and such associated with the grant. Commissioner Moore reiterated his concerns about the cost of the administrator and whether there were funds available in the grant to cover the grant administrator. The Town Administrator stated from what she understood, the Town should not have to contribute any funds for projected related to the grant.

Next, The Town Administrator reviewed the Enterprise funds revenues. Included was the Blue Frog, which were the aerators for the sewer plant that had been requested for some time. That project would hopefully equate savings on electric bill. There would be no increase in storm water fees. It was clarified that Penalties – Water on this page was the late fees collected by customers.

The next item discussed was expenses. The summary of recommended expenses was reviewed, along with what the original requests from Department Heads were, and cuts that were made. The Town Administrator reviewed each department, starting with Administration. She mentioned items that were cut to balance the budget, stating staff researched previous years to decide what to cut. She mentioned that multiple projects were cut from the CIP, including software updates (every other year) and a telephone system. Staff was in the process of getting quotes to see if a new phone system could be done in the current year. No changes in the Elected Officials department, except a slight increase in the phone line item. Mayor Whichard-Brown asked what was covered under the "dues" line item. The Town Administrator reported that line covered dues for the NC Mayor's Association.

Cemetery Department – there were some budgetary cuts, specifically to the budgeted salaries and other line items. The CIP item included cemetery mowers.

Cultural – all stayed the same as last years budget. The library did ask for a small increase, but that was cut.

Debt – Finance Director Harrison discussed the debts, which related to EMS remount, police department, and fire department. Finance Director Harrison reported the Fire Department and Police Department loans were at a 2.25% interest rate, which would save approximately \$30,000 if closed by the end of June 2021.

Economical and Physical Development – the only change in this area was the Boys & Girls Club requested \$20,000, but that stayed at \$15,000, as in the previous year. Commissioner Rodgers asked what was covered under the beautification line. Those were funds put aside for the appearance commission (advisory board). This group would likely be the ones to put new flowers in the flower beds along Main Street, and that was what those funds would be used for.

Fire Department – one large item of note was the capital outlay equipment, and the self-contained breathing apparatus was moved to small equipment. There were other cuts listed on the budget, as well. Commissioner Coffield asked who would be covered with the temporary salaries at the Fire Department. Ms. Harrison reported that included working overtime or covering for a full-time employee when they were out. Chief Peaks stated he had a minimum staffing requirement, so often times part-time employees or volunteers would be asked to work, and would be compensated appropriately. There were a number of volunteers, but that number was much lower than ever before.

Garage Department – there were cuts to balance the budget. The CIP included a fence that was listed in January for \$39,599. That cost was cut back to \$14,600 due to the original quote being old, and the newest fence being manual

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versus automatic. This fence would go on the public works compound to close Tank St., so long as the Board votes to close Tank St. at the next meeting.

OPEB – there was nothing budgeted, as this was an item that is looked at towards the end of the year. Funds would be moved at that time if it was appropriate, as was historically done.

Planning – the biggest cut in this department was the vehicle. The alternative plan for a vehicle had already been discussed. There was \$20,000 budgeted in code enforcement, which was roughly what was spent in 2020. Commissioner Moore stated it had been a few years since the Board discussed setting aside \$30,000 per year on code enforcement. The monies not spent from year to year did not roll over, they were returned to the general fund. Commissioner Moore asked about funds specifically for dilapidated homes, but Ms. Harrison stated monies received for cutting grass or any other code enforcement was put into that line. Commissioner Chesson agreed that an additional \$10,000 would be favorable for the code enforcement line. The Town Administrator expressed her concerns about the Tarheel Motel Building and how that would be addressed, as it was not yet owned by the Town. Commissioner Moore stated he felt the issue with the collapsing buildings would be an on-going issue. The need for putting away money for retained earnings in the future was discussed. Staff discussed the issue of homeowners and building owners not taking responsibility for their dwellings and how that negatively affects the Town due to not being able to collect taxes from the owners. Staff stated they could try to find another \$10,000 for code enforcement.

Police Department – there were no cuts to capitol equipment, but there were cuts out of the small equipment line item and many others, to balance the budget (\$115,928 in cuts just for this department).

Powell Bill – Ms. Harrison stated this was the for the 2 loans (annexation street department and the street sweeper). She discussed the project line for \$25,000 as well, for in-department paving projects. The possibility of being able to do a large project in the near future was discussed, with saving money for multiple years. The Powell bill money could not be moved around like money from the general fund.

Public Building – all upgrades cut out for Town Hall building.

Recreation – lots of cuts to this department, including cuts to capitol outlay (mower, truck cut). The AC project was listed just for informational purposes, and would be completed soon.

Rescue – some things got moved around, and cuts were made to balance the budget.

RRT – the amount received was by contract so no changes.

Sanitation Department – an employee moved to the sanitation department. Some cuts to balance the budget. CIP cuts included the leaf machines and leaf collector box.

Sewer – lots of things were on the wishlist, with the biggest being the Skewarkee sewer interceptor, which was a \$6 million project. That was moved to the next year in the CIP. Director Spivey was looking to see which project was most important to move forward with in the upcoming year. There were a lot of smaller projects being done currently to help get a bigger project in place for the next year.

Storm Water – no changes

Street Department – cuts to all CIP requests (2 water shed improvement projects). Those would need to be revisited before going into the next budget.

Water Department – Meters were included in the department supplies. Those had been being ordered from that line item. There were multiple projects cut in this department. Regarding the auto read meters, that was in the budget but was cut. Staff was hopeful a grant would be received to replace a large portion of the meters, but money was in the department supplies, in case a grant was not received.

Water Districts – no changes to either of the water districts.

If the Board was satisfied with this draft budget, staff would advertise for the budget public hearing at the meeting on April 26, 2021. At that time, the final budget could be adopted.

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Commissioner Chesson commended staff on the budget preparation efforts.

Ms. Harrison asked if the Board wanted staff to try and get an extra \$10,000 for code enforcement or do a budget amendment later if needed. The general consensus was to keep the budget as is and do a budget amendment later, if needed. It could be re-visited next year to see if money could be put aside for the code enforcement line item.

The budget information would be prepared for the next meeting on April 26, 2021.

Commissioner Rodgers referred to page 41 in the packet, specifically a water project listed in the CIP. Commissioner Chesson explained there were many compromised pipes throughout the Town that were causing large amounts of water to leak underground. The specific project listed in the CIP would be for the replacement of water lines.

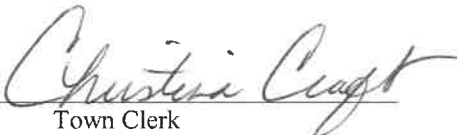
Commissioner Moore asked if staff was able to see an increase in revenues with the latest tax increase. Ms. Harrison stated, "yes", and stated the current amount collected was over what was budgeted.

Commissioner Rodgers recalled there were quite a few cuts from the department heads. Staff stated the Department Heads were instrumental in helping decide on cuts and approving cuts, and they help keep the budget balanced throughout the year. The total amount of cuts was not known.

There being no further business, the Mayor declared the meeting adjourned at 6:58 p.m.

Submitted By:

Approved By:

  
Town Clerk

  
Mayor