

**Town of Stantonsburg
Regular Board Meeting
September 9, 2024**

Mayor Coley Rhodes called the monthly Town Council meeting to order at 7:02 PM. The following council members were present: Donnie Bass, Ben Harper, Jackie Grice, and Steve Mooring. Also present was Town Manager Brian Hawley, Town Clerk Alexis Whitley, and Town Attorney Slade Rand. Eartha Butler was absent.

Pledge of Allegiance and Prayer: Mayor Rhodes led the Pledge of Allegiance and opened the meeting with prayer.

Approval of Agenda: Councilwoman Grice made a motion to approve the agenda. Passed unanimously.

Approval of the Minutes: August 12th Regular Board Meeting Minutes: Councilman Mooring and Manager Hawley clarified the \$2.1M loan in the discussion under Department Reports on page 5, paragraph 4 and 5. Councilman Mooring requested on page 7, paragraph 6 and 7, that “~~Councilman Butler~~” be corrected to “Councilwoman Butler” and Manager Hawley requested the statement “~~FEMA will cover what the deductible will not.~~” be corrected to say “FEMA will cover the deductible and anything the insurance will not.” The regular board meeting minutes were approved as amended.

August 19th Special Called Meeting minutes were approved as written.

Public Comment: Katherine Horton, who resides on Tyson Drive, was present to discuss the rise of property taxes and water usage on Main Street. Ms. Horton stated that there is a property on Main Street that was recently discovered for using water for several years without an active water meter and rumor is that it is owned by Councilman Mooring. She wanted to know if that was true and if there are any moves to back date a bill or do an estimate on how much water might have been used? She stated that it is unfair for those who ask for a variance for their utility bills being that Councilman Mooring may be a deciding member to approve or deny those requests. She also mentioned that using water without payment may be considered theft. Councilman Mooring said he is aware of that and that it was apparently left on when the property was purchased. He stated the over many years there has been minimal usage. He requested the records be pulled to determine a meter reading from the beginning forward. He stated there had been insignificant usage, and he would be glad to pay for the small amount of water that has been used. He is unsure of the amount as he is not using the water and would like the town to verify it through records. He stated there is more significant usage of hundreds of thousands of gallons at other properties. Councilman Mooring clarified with manager Hawley that the town is going to finish checking all of the meters to see of other issues.

Ms. Horton discussed the rise in property taxes. She asked what citizens are paying for with the increase and if there is something the town could do to bring those property tax bills back to sanity. Manager Hawley requested Ms. Horton meet with him so he can discuss why the town budgets the way they do.

Presentations: UTEC was not present. Manager Hawley stated they are going to send out the proposal for the Solar program and he will forward it to the council. They will be present at the October meeting.

Financial Reports:

August: Monthly Receipts: \$404,708.18 Disbursements: \$324,781.75 Difference: \$79,926.43. Report referred to our auditors.

Councilman Bass discussed how quickly the maturity date of the CD is approaching to remind all council members. Manager Hawley mentioned the guidance the council provided previously to move the CD to a higher rated program to NC Capital Management Trust.

Councilman Mooring discussed the Revenue Statement and the auto tax per year. He asked if the local vehicle fee is included in that line. Manager Hawley will check on that.

Invoices for Payment:

Questions regarding invoices were previously answered via email by Finance Officer, Victoria Lucas. Councilman Mooring asked what the CDBG expense of \$8,500.00 was for and manager Hawley stated that was a Grant Administration payment to Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments to administer the CDBG Grant. The town will receive those funds from the grant money to balance out that expense.

Councilwoman Grice made a motion to approve invoices. Passed unanimously.

Manager Hawley presented the invoice for payment to Ryan Marlar, CPA in the amount of \$750.00 for approval.

Old Business:

Manager Hawley discussed the shooting range outside of town and the cease-and-desist letter that was sent to the owner. He spoke with the owner, and they have stopped any further shooting. He stated that the owner would like to rezone but there is a zoning process to do so, and he reiterated that if he wants to present to the council or board of adjustments for anything regarding outdoor shooting, that he will need to provide a plan prior to Manager Hawley bringing it to the council's attention. Regardless, the property owner would need a special use permit to shoot in that area at all. The council further discussed their concerns.

All items have been prepared by staff for Danna Layne. She will give us a start date soon.

An update on abandoned meters was presented by Manager Hawley. Almost 15 meters have been found. Chief Utility System Operator, Roger Sullivan, will be updating this information in Diamond Maps so Manager Hawley can run a report which will give each meter's location.

The Emergency Recovery update was discussed, and Wilson County will not qualify for any reimbursement aide.

Manager Hawley discussed Councilwoman Butler's question regarding life insurance from the last meeting and stated that he was not aware the town provided life insurance for all employees, but the town does. \$66.00 is the monthly coverage for each employee paid at the town's expense and each employee has \$15,000.00 worth of coverage. Councilman Mooring mentioned that Manager Hawley thought at the time that the expense was for one employee's retirement and asked him to confirm that and if the town pays other insurance on that individual. Manager Hawley stated he has not looked into that but he does believe there is one employee on Retirement.

Manager Hawley discussed other towns' expenditures for non-conforming transformers. Lucama does not charge; However, Black Creek will begin charging for anything that their town does not offer for normal operations. Manager Hawley believes it is worth looking into for the town to charge for equipment that is not part of normal operations.

Manager Hawley does not have an update on 911 information.

The lease contract for 101 N Main Street building is still in progress. There is additional information that the town must process and approve, such as a resolution, before a contract can be presented to the tenant.

NCDOT is still refusing to pay the \$1,850.00 repair that was caused by them on Main Street for not calling 811. Councilwoman Grice asked what the next step will be since they are still refusing. Manager Hawley stated his concerns regarding DOT being a state agency and the town working with them on ADA crosswalks.

Councilman Mooring referred to the statement in the August minutes regarding the expenditure statement error in paragraph 10 under old business and requested an explanation for those errors. Manager Hawley stated that it was a Logics system error, and staff can request a written explanation from them.

Councilman Mooring mentioned the \$10,000 penalty to the IRS and requested a status on the town submitting a disagreement on the assessment. The town has not received any further communication from the IRS.

Councilman Mooring mentioned an email sent by manager Hawley to Betsy Kane at UCPCOG on August 26th and asked if a response was received. Manager Hawley stated he did receive a response, and they could not meet originally due to sickness and have not rescheduled yet. Councilman Mooring spoke of Councilwoman Grice's concern about vape shops which rekindled the interest of Betsy's help.

Councilman Mooring asked if Carr, Riggs, and Ingram, LLC refunded any money paid by the town since they were not able to complete the audit. Manager Hawley stated that they did not refund any money, and the town does not expect any reimbursement.

Councilman Mooring mentioned complaints about mosquitoes and wants to know if the town can begin preparing for next year. Manager Hawley mentioned that employee Ed Gurkins, who is individually certified, is already preparing and just needs his public certification for the town to move forward. He discussed how bad mosquitoes are in the 100 block of Commercial Avenue and if the town has done anything about the gentleman on the corner and the 25-50 water-filled tires that have been collected which poses as a huge breeding area for mosquitoes. Manager Hawley stated that the customer received a nuisance letter, and he plans to meet with him this month.

Councilman Mooring referred to page 2 of the August minutes regarding discussion on the past due account of a local business. He further discussed the account.

Councilman Harper discussed the manhole at the stop sign of S. Saratoga and Commercial Ave needing to be patched, and Councilman Mooring discussed a pothole on Thompson Ave beside the bank.

Councilman Harper asked where the town is with the Seal Building/Façade site. Manager Hawley stated the town has a meeting this Wednesday, September 11th, with Green Heron Planning to gain more information to share with the board. Mayor Rhodes stated the \$50,000.00 grant money was partly used to fix the facade, and then the town hired Green Heron Planning with Ben Hitchings to work on a plan for the site. Manager Hawley will send out the original drafts and drawings to the council.

Mayor Rhodes discussed the great turnout for the Recreation Committee's first event for "Sunday in the Burg" which took place on Sunday, September 8th.

New Business:

Manager Hawley presented the resolution to officially approve the insurance renewal for FY 24-25 with John Hackney. There was a consensus of the board to move forward with the insurance renewal. Councilman Harper made a motion to accept the resolution to approve the insurance renewal with John Hackney for fiscal year 2024-2025.

Budget Amendment #0125 was presented. Danna Layne advised the town to not use miscellaneous as a line item, and to create a new line item for purchasing county water. Councilwoman Grice made a motion to accept budget amendment #0125. Passed unanimously.

Plumbing repair costs for a customer were presented for reimbursement. This resident was having plumbing challenges at her home and initially, things were inspected, and no issues were found on the town's side. The plumber found no issue on the customer's side either. The town dug further to investigate and realized that whoever laid the cable years ago crushed the sewer line on the town's side. Manager Hawley and Chief Utility System Operator, Roger Sullivan, recommended that the customer be reimbursed. The council discussed and Councilman Harper made a motion to approve the reimbursement. Passed unanimously.

Manager Hawley presented the invoice for approval to pay Ryan Marlar for his services to prepare for the town's upcoming audit. Councilwoman Grice made a motion to pay Ryan Marlar's invoice for \$750.00. Passed unanimously.

Finance Officer, Victoria Lucas, will be leaving on the 20th of September. Manager Hawley presented a job description for the council to review and requested feedback within the next 2 days to get the job opening posted.

Councilman Mooring discussed the educational requirements for the position. He stated that a bachelor's degree would be good, and a master's degree would be great. He believes if the town had that additional level of education, an accountant would not be needed, and that person could speak directly with the auditor. He clarified the title of the position and whether it would be "Finance Officer" or "Town Clerk/Finance Officer." He said to ensure continuity, which is where we are, since the town will be in a transfer period and hopefully staff has been cross-training. Manager Hawley stated that Town Clerk, Alexis Whitley has been training on payables and Deputy Clerk, Tammy Webb knows how to do payroll. As far as grant reporting Manager Hawley stated he has been doing that. Councilman Mooring asked Manager Hawley if he would be okay with letting the Mayor Rhodes know when he will not be in the office since the town will be short staffed. Attorney Rand stated that all of the council members need to be aware. Manager Hawley stated he can send an email to the council when he is going to be out of the office.

Councilman Harper reiterated the statement about a bachelor's degree that Councilman Mooring discussed, and he stated that experience is important to him. Councilwoman Grice requested to see the applicant's resumes for the open position. The position will be posted on NCLM, job boards, town website and social media. Manager Hawley requested feedback from the council before posting the position.

Department Reports:

Sewer update: Tropical Storm Debby had a major impact on the Wastewater Treatment Plant and Sewer System. 7.4 inches of rain fell in the first 9 days of August with 5.4 inches falling during Tropical Storm Debby. As stated on the Sanitary Sewer Overflow report, the SSO occurred at the main lift station and a bypass occurred at the WWTP on August 8th. The Sanitary Sewer Overflow and the WWTP Bypass were reported to the NCDEQ within the 24-hour reporting period. Copies of the Sanitary Overflow Report and the WWTP Bypass report were provided to Manager Hawley and were reported and submitted to NCDEQ within the 5-day written report deadline. A total suspended Solids permit violation occurred also during the high flow event. Manholes that were flooded during the storm have been sealed. Proficiency testing for the Wastewater Treatment Plant lab was completed on time. A controller for the RAS pump station has failed, the pumps must be ran in manual mode until it is fixed. All other routine maintenance, samples, testing, and reports have been completed.

Water update: The 61 ERT's for radio meter reading that were replaced under prorated warranty have arrived and are in the process of being installed. The automatic controller for the flocculator at the Water Treatment Plant has malfunctioned and is currently being ran on manual mode. The flocculator is a mixing tank for soda ash adjusts pH before entering the system. Manager Hawley considered speaking with Vince Tomaino about adding this to the itemized statement for the appropriations for the grant money that the town was awarded. LSL inventory is approximately 60% completed. The town will not have 100% of all properties checked by the deadline but will still meet the standard to submit by the October deadline. Tony Thigpen with Advanced Power will be starting on the generator maintenance this week. The town did not have any issues on the water side during Tropical Storm Debby. All normal maintenance, samples, and reports were done with no issues.

Electric Department: Developers in the Briar Farm subdivision have reached out to let the town know they moved forward with purchasing 11 lots. The contractors will be starting on 5 of those properties. On the right side of Sand Pit Rd, poles are in place, but the powerlines are needed. All lots have not been sold yet. The only purchase the electric department needs for now is 1 roll of underground wire.

Planning: A meeting is scheduled with the planner for the Seal Building site on Wednesday at 3:00pm via Zoom. All council members are invited if they can attend the Zoom call. Manager Hawley, Mayor Rhodes, Councilman Mooring, and Councilwoman Butler had a 50% complete plan meeting with Jessica Swanson from Turpentine Design for the new town hall building. The plan looks great with minor adjustments. Their next meeting will be Thursday, September 19th at 1:00pm for a 90% complete plan.

Public Works: Powell Bill funds will be used to pay for a new brush on the street sweeper and installation. Powell Bill funds will be used to purchase the new brush. They will also work on potholes this week. The town is facing a few challenges with drainage ditches in a familiar area on Denver Drive where continuous issues occur and our team will need to clear out and in old Wainsfield in the Hemphill/Applewhite area.

Police Department: Police report reviewed.

Mayor and Council Comments:

Councilwoman Grice and Councilman Harper discussed the high grass at a property in town. Councilwoman Grice asked if the new GPS was installed in the other electric department truck. Town Clerk, Alexis Whitley stated that the GPS came and was tagged with an asset ID and given to the department to install.

Councilman Bass asked if the handheld alerts when a meter does not pick up during reading and if there is a secondary check on the readings to be sure all meters read. Manager Hawley stated that pre-reads and re-reads are done during billing time. When Manager Hawley emailed the council this past month, he mentioned that the Itron system the town currently has is outdated and will soon not be supported. The use of smart meters has been discussed. Councilman Harper stated that the town should revisit this soon, especially with the system being outdated. Councilman Mooring asked why they were not aware that a new system was needed during the budgeting process and manager Hawley stated it was not planned for because the council did not request to plan for it as the town has expenditures for all of the financial needs that the town is behind on. He stated that since it was not planned for, he and Chief Utility System Operator, Roger, decided to keep going as the town has been and if something were to occur, the town has \$50,000.00 set aside for a Capital Improvement Project this year which could be used towards that specific project. Councilwoman Grice asked if someone could review the bills before they are sent out. Mayor Rhodes stated that Tammy does review the bills and if anything alerts her, it is re-read.

Councilman Mooring discussed communication between the Town Administrator's and the Town Board. He stated that text messaging is used to communicate a lot of times which goes to his personal phone. He prefers using emails for communication because when corresponding with the town, he uses his iPad and not his personal phone. Councilman Harper stated that he would like to continue to receive text messages from Town Clerk, Alexis, requesting they check their email when needed. Manager Hawley stated that he can communicate through email as requested. It was a consensus of the board to communicate through email unless it is a text message asking the council to check their email.

Councilman Mooring mentioned the 312 S. Main Street property in the July meeting and reiterated that the fence has fallen onto the neighbor's property and needs to be fixed. The assumption is that the town owns that fence but the town plans to do a survey to clarify. He mentioned the town could also start to do maintenance of trees and shrubbery on the property. Councilwoman Grice mentioned kids playing on the property and questioned how long the vehicles will continue to park in the parking lot overnight which could pose as a liability on the town. Town Manager Hawley stated that he has been addressing some of that.

Councilman Mooring mentioned Online Bill Pay being down and asked if that had been resolved. Town Clerk, Alexis Whitley, stated that the issue was a loose wire and it has been resolved. He made the board aware that last Friday only one person was in the office. Manager Hawley and Town Clerk Alexis stated that other employees were sick, and Tammy was on vacation.

Councilman Harper mentioned setting up a trick or treat route this year. His wife and a few others are interested in helping set up this up. The council discussed and decided to move forward with the idea.

Mayor Rhodes mentioned the Letter submitted to the Editor of Wilson Times written by a member of the public who attended the previous meeting. The letter stated how professional the meeting was, how proficient the Town Manager is, how wonderful the board is, the efficiency of the Town Clerk, and how great the Town Attorney was at answering legal questions. She also mentioned the wonderful article written about Mike Deans, a Stantonsburg resident.

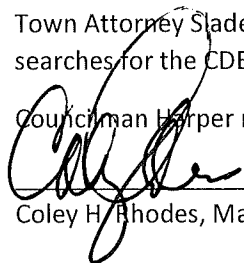
Mayor Rhodes presented the slate of colors recommended by the Appearance Commission for the Façade Grant. Councilman Harper made a motion to approve the slate of colors recommended by the Appearance Commission. Passed unanimously.

Mayor Rhodes reminded everyone that the Crepe Myrtle Festival is on October 12th from 10am-4pm.

Councilman Harper mentioned the Christmas Parade as a reminder to book bands before they are booked up. The council discussed the parade route and lineup.

Town Attorney Slade Rand requested the council's permission to change who is working on title searches for the CDBG Grant. The council had no objections.

Councilman Harper made a motion to adjourn. Passed unanimously.



Coley H. Rhodes, Mayor



Alexis L. Whitley, Town Clerk

