

Stantonsburg Town Council Meeting

June 27, 2024

Continued from recessed meeting of June 17, 2024

Mayor Coley Rhodes called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. Council members present were Donnie Bass, Eartha Butler, Jackie Grice, Ben Harper and Steve Mooring. Also present were Town Manager Brian Hawley, Deputy Clerk Tammy Webb, and Town Attorney Slade Rand. Town Clerk Alexis Whitley was absent. Mayor Rhodes led the Pledge of Allegiance and opened the meeting with prayer.

Councilmember Grice made a motion to approve the agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

New Business:

Councilmember Grice questioned why the Bulk Goods discussion was tabled until the July meeting. Manager Hawley stated it was because Councilmember Butler and he were going to discuss this in length and add suggestions to the information.

The first item to be discussed was employee work hours. The ordinance was provided for review. Attorney Rand suggested we review our ordinance and policies in the upcoming months stating it is "dangerous to include too much information in our ordinances." Councilmember Butler read that staff should "work 5 seven-hour days per week." Councilmember Mooring voiced concern about employee safety, citing that our deputy clerk works alone often and other staff in the office. He also read from our past audit reviews referencing "material weaknesses," (which are the most serious) concerning internal controls and possible deficiencies that are difficult to detect and fix citing #2017-01 (segregation of duties and cash receipts). In the audit, it was stated that when only 1 person is working, there are no checks or balances in place. It was noted that the office staff takes turns working on Fridays and leaving an hour early each day during the week when they work Friday mornings. Councilmember Mooring said that one of the reasons our town is on the Unit Assistance List with the LGC is because of these material weaknesses stated in our audits. Town Attorney Rand interrupted saying "that is not why you are on the Unit Assistance List." He said that the reason is because we are behind 2 years on our audit. Councilmember Mooring said that we had to reply to the LGC about our deficiencies and how we were addressing those concerns, and we do have an additional employee now, but he was concerned about the weaknesses still being present. Attorney Rand said his point was well-taken. Manager Hawley said that he can work internally so the staff members won't have to be alone until the board can hold a workshop on work hours. Councilmember Butler mentioned that not only the money aspect is concerning but also possible irate customers pose a threat for this situation. Manager Hawley's presence in the office on Friday was discussed. Councilmember Harper mentioned alternating days for office staff. Manager Hawley asked for time to discuss different options with staff. Arrivals before the 8:00 AM workday begins, lunch breaks, other employees with different work hours, fairness, overtime pay, comp time, early hour disturbances and standardizing were topics discussed. The council decided to find a date for a workshop discussing the work hours, etc. Manager Hawley requested time to check his schedule and send out possible dates for the workshop.

The next order of business was the CDBG Grant. Mayor Rhodes distributed the bylaws for the Housing Committee adopted at the September 2022 meeting. Mayor Rhodes said the information in our packet that was included by Manager Hawley was not correct. Ben Farmer from UCPCOG who is working with us on this grant said that a meeting at the end of July was to be scheduled and the committee would fill its vacancies at that meeting in accordance with the bylaws. Councilmember Grice submitted 2 names for the committee to consider filling the vacancies. Her recommendations were Bill Edmundson and Powell Dew. There was discussion about the former members, Amy Charles Windley, Walt Bynum (council slot), Barbara Aycock (town manager slot), Coley Rhodes, Mayor, Edwin Bynum and Ben Farmer (UCPCOG). Town Attorney Rand interjected that the council may amend the bylaws. He said, "I've just never heard of a committee appointing its own members...Don't take my comments to suggest you do something different. I'm just saying that this board is in charge of committees so you could have 50 members if the board wants, but at some point, you could lose your effectiveness. The safeguard you do have on the committee are the elected board members and officials and the manager so theoretically they will act on the council's behalf." Mayor Rhodes asked if the board wanted to amend the bylaws to add more people. Attorney Rand said, "I am not recommending that you do that." Mayor Rhodes said, "If the board would like to amend the bylaws we can and we will if that is what you wish." Councilmember Butler reminded the board not to lose sight of the goal of getting houses to be replaced or repaired by the grant done. Mayor Rhodes asked Councilmember Grice if all the discussion on this committee was happening because of the controversy about the town committees. She admitted that it was and said, "I'm not targeting you, but..." Mayor Rhodes said "I wonder why, in your petition that you signed, which was very derogatory toward me accusing me of being a racist and a conspirator that now, given a choice of citizens to add to this committee, you chose 2 white males. Councilmember Grice interrupted saying "It was not my petition although I did sign it, I didn't read it or know what it said. I did not say you were a racist." Mayor Rhodes said, "Well that was what was stated in that petition, and you signed it as one of the original writers. That topic has been mentioned at every board meeting since you took your seat on the board, and I have held my tongue and tried to take the high road but it's time now to address this and get it in the open." Mayor Rhodes also said that she has listened as facts have been twisted and lies told portraying her in an unfavorable light. From two years ago, when the last committees and commissions were approved by the board, to July 2023 when the board by unanimous consensus approved the sitting committees, 3 males and 3 females were added as well as 4 blacks while 2 white positions were taken away. Mayor Rhodes said that if Councilmember Grice wanted to put her 2 requests forward to be on the CDBG Housing Committee that was fine with her. Mayor Rhodes is Chair; Edwin Bynum is Vice-Chair and Ms. Aycock was the Secretary. Councilmember Butler had expressed an interest in serving as the council member and although Mayor Rhodes asked for another member of the board to help Ms. Butler, no one offered. Councilmember Grice said she wanted Edmundson and Dew on this committee because they offered to help in any way and questioned why Walt Bynum and Edwin Bynum had to be on it. It was stated that they, too, offered to help in any way. Councilmember Butler said she would be glad to serve as a council member and it was a consensus that she be our council appointment. There was concern about possible members being added who were difficult to work with. Councilmember Grice removed one of her recommendations and submitted one name for the Housing Committee at their July meeting.

Quotes were submitted from the League and Triangle for insurance. Triangle was less expensive, and Manager Hawley recommended staying with Triangle with the Blue Cross Blue Shield Plan. Councilmember Harper made a motion to stay with Triangle BCBS proposed plan. Passed unanimously.

Discussing how to save money Manager Hawley shared some facts about our budget. He said that our police department is the most expensive portion of the budget. If we would let Wilson County police us, as they already do when our police are not scheduled to work, like every other town in Wilson County, we could get our rates down from \$.50 to \$.28 (below revenue neutral) and it would give us enough revenue so that no citizen in town or the ETJ would have to have to be billed for sanitation expenses.

Councilmember Grice made a motion to approve the amendment for the park fund appropriation from Wilson County. Passed unanimously.

Councilmember Grice made a motion to approve the budget amendment 14/24 which puts ARP money in an account with an account number assigned tomorrow. Passed unanimously.

Manager Hawley said we have a report from DEQ on the animal remains that were found. The problem has been fixed.

The water tower was repaired while we bought water from Wilson County. All went well.

Soil and erosion plan received today.

Jr. Davis is no longer employed with the town. Billy Hawkins is back from medical leave on light duty.

General Fund Revenues are \$756,789.00

General Fund Expenditures are \$707,363.32.

Surplus was \$49,425.75 (ARP not included)

Trial Balance is \$1,600,000.00

Estimated electrical fund revenues: \$3,447,115. (Planned, but stopped PPA)

Electrical fund revenues: \$3,220,827.16

Electrical fund expenditures: \$2,307,478.00.

Surplus of \$913,347.68

Next week, Louis of UTEC and Manager Hawley will begin work on the electric rate study.

Water/Sewer revenues are \$979,871.82

Water/Sewer expenditures are \$880,000.00

Surplus is \$9,955.83

Combined surplus of \$1,062,530.25 (FY 2024)

Grant funds were in the general fund, and they should not be so Danna Layne will be here soon to work with Manager Hawley and Finance Officer Victoria Lucas on this.

Can move forward to disposing of records soon because we now have a signature card on file with the state archives which prevented us from proceeding with the disposition.

Manager Hawley said, "It's been a difficult last couple of months for me and my family. I'm going to read something to make a statement." He then read this statement:

"I'd just like the town council to know that in our July meeting I would like to move to a closed session to discuss personnel concerns. In addition, I'd like the council to know that I was informed of a nasty rumor that questioned my commitment to my wife. After I went home last night and made my wife aware of this rumor, her initial response was for me to come in this morning and resign. However, I know we are making a difference for the public and I have a passion to do what's right. Council, these kinds of personal attacks have no place in our organization, and I ask you to please quell these vicious claims if you are approached. Also, for the July meeting, I would like the council to consider a discussion of an ethical and conflicts of interest policy update that will support our staff in their efforts in their daily duties without interruptions. During my vacation, there were rumors that someone in town hall will be leaving. I would like to point out that this would be a personnel matter if it were true, but it has already caused harm to our staff's morale. I feel I owe it to myself, my wife and the team to address these concerns so they are not allowed to fester to a point where this team begins to vacate due to the hostile environment that is being developed. Lastly, I would like this council to know I appreciate the support that the council voted to provide me. I'm honored to have this opportunity and my commitment is to begin emailing board members after a board member meets with me or one of our employees. This way, we are keeping the entire council informed on all matters related to town business and preventing any perceptions of undermining your authority. I work at the pleasure of this board and my loyalty is to the entire board. Thank you."

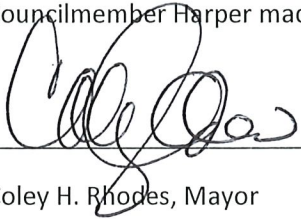
Councilmember Mooring expressed interest in our OneDrive not loading properly and asked for an investigation into that. He mentioned the fuel and gas usage and asked for a data analysis of usage to better understand why our usage is so excessive. Concerning 911 calls, their invoicing is questionable (as evidenced by the lack of an invoice and payment of a bill that Councilmember Mooring found when reviewing 911 data.) There is no understanding of the many excuses and explanations that we have been given over the years for our exorbitant charges of thousands of dollars. Each call seems to cost the town over \$17.50. Councilmember Butler asked if there was a way the citizens could be advised about the high costs of 911 and informed about the phone number to our police station so that could be the first call if it is not a dire emergency. Manager Hawley suggested a blitz on social media with the nonemergency number published for the public. Attorney Rand offered to investigate the cost with the 911 agency. Councilmember Mooring also mentioned that since our weather has been so hot and dry that we have extra time when we are usually mowing that we could be clearing some of the rubbish and plants from 312 South Main (our new town hall.) Manager Hawley agreed. Councilmember Mooring said our overtime increased over 100 hours in May from April, but we had some major happenings. He also expressed concern over the utility bill transmission error that caused many problems last month.

He asked for the root cause of the problem, the corrective action and the revisions the situation caused so we can prevent it from happening again. Staff discovered the issue, addressed it and put in a plan moving forward.

Manager Hawley mentioned the 911 call on Commercial last week when one of our part time officers was working. There was a previous altercation, body cam footage and concerns that he will speak with the board about at the July meeting concerning this situation.

Councilmember Butler asked about a solution to people coming to the library asking for the police.

Councilmember Harper made a motion to adjourn. Passed unanimously.



Coley H. Rhodes, Mayor



Tammy L. Webb, Deputy Clerk