Town of Stantonsburg
Regular Council Meeting Minutes
July 13, 2026

Attendance

Present were Mayor Coley Rhodes; Mayor Pro Tem Powell Dew; Councilpersons Carla Davis, Skip Covert, Jackie Grice, and Eartha Butler; Town Manager Brian Hawley; Town Clerk Christie Cobb; Attorney Gabe DuSablon; Auditor Danna Layne; Utilities Superintendent Roger Sullivan; and members of the public.

Call to Order

Mayor Coley Rhodes called the regular meeting of the Stantonsburg Town Council to order on July 13, 2026, at 6:30 p.m. Mayor Rhodes led the Pledge of Allegiance and offered the invocation.

Motion to Approve Agenda

Upon motion by Councilperson Jackie Grice and second by Councilperson Skip Covert, Council initially approved the agenda. During discussion of the prior minutes, Mayor Pro Tem Powell Dew clarified that although he had previously advised Council of a possible resignation date, he had since consulted with Council and the Town Attorney regarding residency requirements and intended to submit a resignation at the appropriate time rather than on the previously referenced date. Following that clarification, Town Manager Brian Hawley recommended removing the final three New Business items related to replacing Mayor Pro Tem Dew as check signatory, Tri-Town Committee representative, and Mayor Pro Tem. Upon motion by Councilperson Carla Davis, second by Councilperson Skip Covert, and unanimously carried, Council amended the agenda to remove those three items from consideration.

Motion to Approve Minutes

Council reviewed the minutes of June 29, 2026, special called meeting. Mayor Pro Tem Powell Dew requested that the minutes be corrected to reflect the additional open-session discussion concerning his possible resignation, residency requirements, and timing. Attorney Gabe DuSablon advised that discussion occurring in open session may be reflected in the minutes and that minutes are intended to memorialize actions taken and provide a useful account of discussion. Council approved the minutes with the requested correction.

Public Comment

Mr. Stephen Edwards addressed Council regarding the Town cemetery. Mr. Edwards stated that he owns cemetery lots associated with the Edwards and Lane family plots and requested permission to install a permanent American flagpole between those plots. He stated that Moye Fence Company, through Brian Webb, would professionally install the flagpole on his behalf, that the proposed flag would be lit, and that he wanted the installation to be respectful and properly located. Mr. Edwards noted that he had a similar flagpole at his residence for Council or staff to view. Council received the comment and later discussed the request during the cemetery guidelines item.

Presentations

Auditor Danna Layne presented the Fiscal Year 2024 audit. Ms. Layne advised that the Town received an unmodified opinion, the highest level of assurance for the financial statements. She explained the audit process, the purpose of the Management Discussion and Analysis, and the difference between modified accrual statements used for budgetary operations and full accrual statements used for enterprise funds. She reviewed governmental fund assets, liabilities, and fund balance, noting an approximately $1.1 million General Fund balance. She also reviewed the Electric Fund and Water/Sewer Fund, including current assets, capital assets, liabilities, net position, operating revenues, and the impact of depreciation on the Water/Sewer Fund.

Ms. Layne reported that the Yellow Book audit identified no material weaknesses but did include significant deficiencies and statutory findings. Findings discussed included segregation of duties resulting from multiple finance officer transitions and use of third-party accounting assistance, late audit submission, budgetary over-expenditure in the Water/Sewer Fund of approximately $11,000, and an insufficient finance officer bond that should have been set at approximately ten percent of original budgeted funds, subject to statutory limits. Ms. Layne also noted recommendations related to billing service, inventory, and meter reconciliation. She reviewed required Local Government Commission performance indicators, including General Fund balance, Water/Sewer Fund ratios, electric fund indicators, and the need for a board response letter by September 11, 2026. Council asked questions regarding the prior-year restatement, and Ms. Layne explained that it related to disposal of an asset for which accumulated depreciation had not been written off at the same time.

Financial Reports

Town Manager Hawley presented the monthly financial summary and reports. He reported monthly receipts of $533,907.66 and monthly disbursements of $585,775.84, with USDA debt service payments totaling approximately $100,893.30 contributing significantly to the month's disbursements. The financial summary reflected total Truist account balances of $2,936,226.67, investment account balances of $6,822,304.77, and a grand total of $9,758,531.44 as of June 30, 2026.

Council discussed the reports, including a question from Mayor Pro Tem Dew regarding a $3,008.33 credit card purchase from NC Hammock Co., which Mr. Hawley explained was for benches for the Appearance Commission to be placed in front of the library. Upon motion by Councilperson Eartha Butler, second by Councilperson Carla Davis, and unanimously carried, Council approved the financial reports.

Council considered the Nunn, Brashear & Uzzell, P.A. invoice for the FY2024 audit in the amount of $22,500.00, which had been approved by Local Government Commission staff. Mr. Hawley explained that although the audit contract had previously been approved, the completed audit invoice required Council approval before payment. Upon motion by Councilperson Eartha Butler, second by Councilperson Skip Covert, and unanimously carried, Council approved payment of the FY2024 audit invoice.

Council then discussed the remaining invoices. Councilperson Jackie Grice requested that the monthly invoice documentation be included in a readable format, stating that the copies of checks in the packet were difficult to read and that she preferred the supporting invoice documentation Council had previously received. Staff stated that the documentation would be provided. Upon motion by Councilperson Skip Covert, second by Councilperson Eartha Butler, and unanimously carried, Council approved the remaining invoices.

Departmental Reports

Utilities Superintendent Roger Sullivan presented departmental updates. For the Electric Department, he reported ongoing system maintenance, including pole replacements, insulator and ground repairs, tree trimming, and right-of-way work. He reported four after-hours calls in June, including one outage affecting approximately five customers, several new services on Woodbridge Road, and forty-five completed work orders. He also advised that the bucket truck had been ordered and that a heavier-duty rotary cutter had also been ordered.

For Water and Sewer, Mr. Sullivan reported that the NCDEQ Public Water Section inspection resulted in no violations or deficiencies. He advised that the transformer inside Well No. 4 failed on June 13, 2026, but the replacement was ordered and the well was returned to service the following Tuesday. He also reported that a leak behind the wastewater treatment plant was repaired the same day it was discovered, that Cody Sowers completed C-Well classes and is expected to take the State exam in August, and that required reports and sampling were completed without violations.

For Streets and Sanitation, Mr. Sullivan reported that the garbage truck was sent to White's International for a low/no power issue believed to involve a warranty-covered sensor. He noted that Saratoga's truck was used once and that the new diesel lawn mower and finishing mower had been delivered. Council also discussed work hours, equipment uses, mowing needs, herbicide certification, and obtaining a map of Town wells for review.

Town Manager Reports

Town Manager Hawley reported on stormwater, public safety, planning, technology, grant projects, the new Town Hall, Tri-Town matters, cemetery operations, and summer work schedules.

He advised that staff continues to pursue stormwater funding opportunities and that the Town's stormwater master plan may be selected as a case study for the North Carolina Chapter of the American Public Works Association conference in Winston-Salem.

Mr. Hawley reported that Sheriff's Office reports were included in the packet and that approved cameras had been ordered. He asked Council to consider additional cameras at the big shop and behind the current Town Hall. Council requested that staff review costs, relocation options, and feasibility before bringing the matter back.

He reported that the Planning Board would meet at 1:00 p.m. on the third Monday of each month, unless affected by a holiday. He also advised that Computer Central was updating the Town website and completing technology work at the new facility, including sound equipment and data ports, to improve accessibility compliance and posting capability.

Mr. Hawley reported that CDBG environmental studies had been submitted for two additional properties and that one house was in the final phase of completion. Council discussed a possible ribbon cutting or welcome-home event if the family was interested. He also reported that the Sewer Rehab II extension had been submitted to NCDEQ, reimbursement requests for emergency repairs were pending, and progress continued on rehabilitation of Well No. 2.

Regarding the new Town Hall, Mr. Hawley reported that flooring, millwork, countertops, and plumbing fixture installation were nearing completion. He invited Council to attend a walkthrough the following day. He also advised that one HVAC unit had failed and that staff would seek additional options and quotes for repairs or replacement.

Mr. Hawley further reported that Ed Beddingfield had returned for additional recording work, and that part of the invoice was proposed as a donation to the Crepe Myrtle Festival. He also met with the historical committee regarding possible display options in the new Town Hall, including a video loop and display case.

He updated Council on AIA grant applications for water and sewer and stated that the Town was awaiting award confirmations. He also reported progress by the Tri-Town Committee on substation matters, engineering, a point of contact, and development of formal agreements. Council requested more timely updates from Tri-Town meetings.

Mr. Hawley reported that staff was considering removal of five small trees at the new Town Hall to improve camera placement, protect the roof, and allow space for a flagpole and landscaping. Council also discussed a possible dedication plaque.

Finally, Mr. Hawley reviewed cemetery concerns, including flagpoles, walls, and other plot improvements that may interfere with maintenance, and recommended that staff prepare clearer cemetery guidelines. He also reported seasonal summer work-hour adjustments for Public Works, Water/Sewer, Electric, and sanitation staff.

New Business

1. Swimming Pool Sewer Credit Policy. Council considered the proposed Swimming Pool Fill Sewer Credit Policy. Mr. Hawley explained that the policy was intended to formalize existing practice and provide staff with a consistent process for evaluating sewer credits when metered water is used to fill a swimming pool and does not enter the sanitary sewer system. Council discussed verification of pool size, documentation, customer averages, tracking credits in the billing system, and limiting the credit to eligible sewer usage only. Attorney DuSablon stated that the policy was well laid out, defensible, and included safeguards by basing the credit on the lesser of documented pool-fill volume or excess usage above normal average consumption. Upon motion by Mayor Pro Tem Powell Dew, second by Councilperson Carla Davis, and unanimously carried, Council approved the Swimming Pool Fill Sewer Credit Policy.

2. Utility Availability Fee. Council discussed the proposed Utility Availability Charge Policy. Mr. Hawley stated that he and Attorney DuSablon had not yet had sufficient time to complete legal review. Mayor Pro Tem Dew asked whether the policy adequately addressed properties that have electricity and water service but use septic systems instead of sewer service. Attorney DuSablon indicated the item should be reviewed further. Council tabled consideration of the Utility Availability Fee for additional staff and legal review.

3. Cemetery Guidelines. Council discussed the existing cemetery guidelines, the request from Mr. Edwards to install a flagpole, and the broader need to update cemetery rules. Mayor Pro Tem Dew noted that a cemetery committee had existed years earlier and suggested exploring whether a committee or similar citizen involvement could help maintain the cemetery properly and appropriately. Council discussed current conditions in the cemetery, including walls, borders, benches, plants, flagpoles, and other items around plots, and acknowledged that the existing written guidelines appear general and have not been consistently enforced.

Council discussed whether the Town should consider a common flagpole area rather than approving individual flagpoles on plots, and whether a flagpole could be placed at an entrance, in the center, or at multiple locations if appropriate. Mr. Edwards stated that he would be willing to fund a flagpole in honor of his father at no cost to the Town, and Mr. Hawley stated that he would also be willing to contribute personally if Council permitted. Council did not approve a specific installation at this meeting. Instead, Council directed staff to review locations, consider whether there is a suitable area without graves, examine existing cemetery conditions, and place cemetery guidelines back on a future agenda for further discussion.

4. Ordinance Section Regarding Internet Sweepstakes/Electronic Gaming. Council discussed the proposed ordinance language concerning unlawful electronic gaming, internet sweepstakes, gambling, and similar operations. Attorney DuSablon provided background on state law and explained the distinction between criminal enforcement and land-use regulation. He advised that businesses operating as internet cafés or sweepstakes establishments are generally unlawful when they violate North Carolina gambling and sweepstakes laws, and that any local ordinance should align with state-law definitions. After reviewing the existing Town Code provision, Attorney DuSablon advised that repealing Article 6.1.3 was appropriate.

Upon motion by Councilperson Carla Davis, second by Councilperson Eartha Butler, and unanimously carried, Council approved repeal of Article 6.1.3 of the Town Code. Staff and legal counsel will continue reviewing replacement ordinance language as appropriate.

5. Litigation Notice. Before proceeding with the final agenda item, Mr. Hawley advised Council that the Town had received notice of litigation involving claims related to the actions of a former police chief. He reported that the matter had been submitted to the Town's insurance carrier and that counsel had been assigned. Attorney DuSablon stated that the assigned insurance counsel was experienced and competent. No action was taken.

6. Designation of Vehicles as Surplus. Council considered designating certain vehicles as surplus for disposal in accordance with applicable North Carolina General Statutes. Mr. Hawley reviewed the list and clarified that not every vehicle in the packet was proposed for surplus. He recommended withholding the 2001 GMC electric line work truck from surplus consideration because staff wished to evaluate whether it could be converted for use as a dump truck, potentially avoiding the cost of purchasing a replacement dump truck.

The vehicles identified for surplus included the 1997 International, 2003 Ford F-150, 2011 Dodge Charger, 2013 Ford Explorer, 2018 Dodge Charger, 2004 Ford Crown Victoria, 2021 Dodge Durango, and 1999 Ford Ranger. Upon motion by Mayor Pro Tem Powell Dew, second by Councilperson Skip Covert, and unanimously carried, Council approved designating those eight vehicles as surplus.

Council Comments

Councilperson Jackie Grice began Council Comments by briefly noting resident communications, including a safety-related concern in an email that appeared questionable.

Council also briefly discussed Sheriff's Office coverage, including ongoing efforts to address school safety coverage.

Mayor Rhodes thanked Town Clerk Christie Cobb for her work assisting with former Police Department records and materials.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before Council, upon motion by Councilperson Eartha Butler, seconded by Councilperson Jackie Grice, and unanimously carried, the meeting was adjourned 8:35 p.m.

Approved by:

Coley Rhodes, Mayor

Christie Cobb, Town Clerk