

# MINUTES OF THE WHITSETT TOWN COUNCIL

February 13, 2024

Whitsett Town Hall Building

## REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING

The regular meeting of the Whitsett Town Council was held on Tuesday, February 13, 2024, at the Whitsett Town Hall. The following members of the Town Council were present: Mayor Chip Bell, Mayor Pro Tem Jerry Rice and Council Members Craig York, Lee Greeson and Cindy Wheeler. Also present were Becky Loy from Cobb, Ezekiel and Loy, Town Administrator Elaine Garner and Town Clerk Barbara York as well as 5 citizens of Whitsett.

Mayor Bell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and noted that a quorum was present. He asked Mayor Pro Tem Jerry Rice to give the invocation.

Mayor Bell recognized Becky Loy who then spoke to the Council about the results of the 2022-2023 audit. She passed out the audit result books and letters with all the results of the accounting. Overall, the audit went very well, and Mrs. Loy discussed some changes and thoughts for the Council and Budget Committee to consider when creating future budgets. One of her main suggestions was to consider how we can increase our water budget so in case there were a water infrastructure emergency, the Town would be able to pay for it.

## OLD BUSINESS

### 1. Adoption of the Minutes

- Council Member Craig York called for a motion to accept the December 2023 minutes. There was no meeting in January due to weather issues. Mayor Bell made a motion to accept the minutes from the December 12, 2023, Town Council Meeting. Mayor Pro Tem Jerry Rice seconded the motion and the adoption of the December 12, 2023; minutes was carried by unanimous vote.

### 2. Any Other Old Business

- Council Member Craig York asked if there was any further Old Business and there was none.

## BOARD AND COMMITTEE REPORTS

### 1. Planning Board

- Planning Board Chairperson Karen Horne reported the Board did not meet this month due to lack of a quorum. She also made the Council aware the Vice Chairperson Charles Sedoris had resigned his position on the Board. Dr. Matt Martin has agreed that he will change his position of an alternate to that of a Board Member. There is still an opening on the board for vice chairperson that needs to be filled.
- Mrs. Horne also let the Council know that there is currently a home in the Whitsett Town Limits in which the owners are advertising as an Airbnb/camping nightly rental site. The owners have converted a storage building into a bungalow type dwelling. In speaking with Guilford County, that this property is zoned agricultural and as our ordinance states can have scattered nonfarm residences on the track of land. The key word in the ordinance is "residence" and in order to be a residence there must be hot and cold water, a place to sleep, a place to prepare food and wastewater facilities (toilet). Per the photo there is a porta-john as their waste collection system and Guilford County does not allow that. Mrs. Horne and Town Administrator Elaine Garner have called Guilford County asking for an investigation into this matter. If there is going to be a second residence on this property, it must meet the standards of a residence. Mayor Pro Tem Jerry Rice asked for them to include in the investigation the improper fencing that this owner has on someone else's property.

### 2. Enforcement Officer

- Town Administrator Elaine Garner let the Council know that there was nothing to report in this area.

### 3. Town Administrator

- Mrs. Garner spoke of the water/sewer agreement that the Town is currently working on with Gibsonville and Burlington. With this agreement, Whitsett will hope to be paying Burlington for the water and Gibsonville for the sewer. The agreement is in the process of being fine-tuned correctly to state which town is responsible for what. A zoom meeting has been scheduled to iron out the details of this agreement.
- Mrs. Garner also discussed with the Council that it has been determined that the cost of building the picnic shelter using the remainder of the \$50,000 grant is not an option. The cost of an even smaller and more simply designed shelter costs more than what is left in the grant. It was suggested that instead of a shelter at this time, that we use the grant money to purchase picnic tables, a grill, and a concrete slab for them to sit on. Mrs. Garner presented some bids to the Council for their review. The Council will discuss what they want to do about this topic at the next meeting. There is still concern about excessive noise and other issues if we were to provide a public picnic area.

### NEW BUSINESS

- **New Attorney for Whitsett**
- Mayor Bell explained that the Town has terminated services with our former attorney, Joe Kalo. The mayor and Council Member Craig York had been to a conference put on by the NC League of Municipalities and heard of a firm in Chapel Hill that only works with small municipalities like ours. Because we were in immediate need of counsel regarding the water/sewer agreement, he decided to hire Kevin Hornik with the firm Brough Law Firm. Council Member Lee Greeson made the motion to accept Brough Law Firm as our new attorney firm. The motion was seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Jerry Rice and was approved unanimously.
- **Vote for Finance Officer and Assistant Finance Officer**
- At the December meeting, the Council nominated Mayor Pro Tem Jerry Rice for the Town's Finance Officer and Town Clerk Barbara York as the Assistant Finance Officer but neglected to vote. Mayor Bell made a motion to accept both nominations to have Jerry Rice and Barbara York serve for these positions. The motion was seconded by Council Member Cindy Wheeler, and it was approved unanimously.
- **Approve Amendment Extending Interlocal Agreement on Tax Collections**
- Mayor Bell explained that this document is standard procedure year after year and there will be an increase in the amount of taxes that are being taken from the Whitsett residents' taxes. The budget committee will need to keep this in mind when working on the upcoming budget. Mayor Pro Tem Jerry Rice made a motion to accept the Amendment Extending Interlocal Agreement on Tax Collections. Council Member Lee Greeson seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.
- **Streetlight(s) at front of Town Hall**
- Town Clerk Barbara York discussed the need for more light at the front of the Town Hall. At night when leaving meetings, the parking lot, front steps, and handicap ramp are all very dark. Ms. York had spoken with Duke Energy about getting street/flood lights put in the front lawn to light up the areas from the kitchen entrance to the handicap ramp on the other side of the building. The Council had questions about what the light ordinance says about this topic. They do not want lights to be a disturbance to the Town Hall's neighbors. It was suggested that porch lights be investigated rather than streetlights. Mayor Pro Tem Jerry Rice made a motion to table this discussion until the best option for lighting the front of the Hall is further investigated. Council Member Lee Greeson seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.
- **Quotes on floor repair in Council Room**
- Council Member Craig York presented the Council with three bids to sand and refinish the floors in the Council Room. After studying the bids, Mayor Bell made a motion to accept the bid by Hardwoods Unlimited. Council Member Cindy Wheeler seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.
- **Phone Lines for the Office**
- Ms. York discussed with the Council the need for more than one active phone line in the Town Hall. There are currently two phones with one phone line. She stated if someone is talking on the phone ending in 3380, the person calling in gets a busy signal. Ms. York explained that the Hall actually has two phone lines, one for the phone and one for the fax machine that is never used. A representative from Spectrum told Ms. York that we could disconnect the fax machine line, giving us another phone line, with no extra being charged to our monthly phone bill. Also, now that there are multiple people working in different rooms in the Hall, there is also a need for two more phones. Ms. York checked with Office Depot and they have a package with one desk phone and one wireless handheld phone for \$125. If we purchased two of

those packages, we could plug both desk phones into the two phone jacks in the office and the mayor and our museum curator could have wireless handheld phones in their offices. Mayor Bell made a motion for Ms. York to purchase the two sets of phones and arrange with Spectrum to provide the appropriate services of rolling over the lines, etc. Council Member Craig York seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously.

- **Water bill late fees – Karen Horne**

- Planning Board Chairperson Karen Horne explained that there are currently a couple of water bill customers that are working the system to only pay their bill every other month and it only costs them \$7 for a late fee. Ms. Horne has researched late fees in other towns and found that some towns allow 20 days (rather than our 30 days) to pay their bill. If they don't pay their bill within the 20 days, there is a \$20 late fee. If they still haven't paid their bill after 40 days, their account becomes delinquent, and they must pay \$30 for a late fee as well as disconnect and reconnect fees. The Planning Board is going to study this further as changing our policy and the structure of the Utility Fees to something like this would require a Public Hearing. In the meantime, Council Member Lee Greeson made a motion to put this topic on the agenda for the Public Hearing and Council Member Craig York seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

- **Water Meters and Cellular reader**

- Planning Board Chairperson Karen Horne explained to the Council that there has been some discussion about upgrading the new water radio read meters that we recently purchased to cellular capable readers. They also are looking into the cellular reading device which would send readings daily to the Town's computer rather than only one time per month. This cellular reading device is quite expensive, and our current budget is unable to pay for that at this time. Ms. Horne recommended that we not purchase the cellular device at this time. She did ask the Council to consider whether they want to go ahead and purchase the cellular capable meters in case in the future we decide to get the cellular reading device. The Council asked that she get information on the Cellular vs. Noncellular options including yearly costs and the longevity of the cellular meters to bring back to the Council.

#### **MOTION TO HAVE CLOSED SESSION**

- Council Member Craig York made a motion for the Council to go into a closed session. The motion was seconded by Mayor Bell and the Council left the room for a closed session.
- Mayor Bell called the Regular Council Meeting back to order.
- Mayor Bell called the meeting back to order once the Council returned from the Closed Session.

- **Any Items from Council**

- Council Member Craig York asked if there were any other items from the Council. Council Member Lee Greeson requested that Town Clerk Barbara York call the Town's lawncare service and ask him to remove the leaves from around the ballfield fence.

- **Announcements**

- Mayor Bell asked if there were any announcements and there were none.

- **Speakers from the Floor**

- Council Member Craig York asked if there were any Speakers from the Floor. Tanisha Dukes, who is running for NC House of Representatives for District 59 stepped forward to update the Council on her platform for our area. The Council requested that she address the terrible traffic issues our area is currently experiencing, and which will get much worse as all the developments start having residents move in. Regarding these developments, where will all the children be going to school as the schools are already full. The lack of law enforcement in Whitsett is also a big problem.

- **ADJOURNMENT**

- With no further business before the Council, Council Member Craig York invited a motion to adjourn. The motion to adjourn was made by Mayor Pro Tem Jerry Rice and seconded by Council Member Lee Greeson. The motion carried; and the February 13, 2024, Town Council meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:57 p.m. The next regular meeting of the Whitsett Town Council is scheduled for 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, March 12, 2024, at the Whitsett Town Hall.

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Chip Bell, Mayor

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Elaine Garner, Town Administrator

**APPROVED:**