

TOWN OF COATS
Board of Commissioners
Thursday, March 14, 2024
Official Minutes

The Town of Coats Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Thursday, March 14, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. in the Board of Commissioners' Meeting Room at Coats Town Hall.

Members Present:

Mayor Chris Coats
Mayor Pro Tem Marc Powell
Commissioner Jerry Beasley
Commissioner Kelvin Gilbert
Commissioner Shirley Allen

Others Present:

Nick Holcomb, Town Manager
Connie Lassiter, Finance Director/Town Clerk
Rodney Pleasant, Public Works Director
Ken Storicks, Police Chief
Mike Collins, Parks & Recreation Director
Brian Taylor, Attorney

I. CALL TO ORDER

A quorum being present, Mayor Chris Coats called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

A. Invocation & Pledge

Mayor Coats delivered the invocation and led those in attendance in the Pledge of Allegiance.

B. Approval of Agenda

RESOLVED, to approve agenda.

MOTION BY: Commissioner Kelvin Gilbert

SECOND BY: Commissioner Shirley Allen

APPROVED: Unanimously Approved

II. PUBLIC FORUM

Mayor Chris Coats opened the Public Forum.

Vikki Ingersoll of 30 N Railroad St spoke as the business owner of Abby & Bella's and as Coats Chamber of Commerce President with concern for the future of Main St and noted that a decline in foot traffic had affected sales and more businesses were needed. She expressed her belief that the poor condition of Main St was to blame. She suggested adding trees, trash cans, painting the parking lot lines as improvements. She requested that something be done about the unused rundown buildings on Main St for safety reasons due to broken windows and rusted locks that prevented the doors to remain closed. She stated that she appreciated Farmer's Corner and the pergola with benches but that more was needed.

Brandy Babnaw, owner of Time Honored Tattoos at 46 E Main St, echoed concern regarding the broken glass and unsecured abandoned buildings on Main St and added that animals and people

were entering those buildings and posed a safety risk. She requested that a portion of the revitalization grant go toward the exteriors of small businesses for paint, signage and accessibility ramps.

Ryan Pope, owner of Pope Financial Services at 140 N McKinley St and Coats Chamber of Commerce Treasurer, presented each Commissioner with a written letter requesting that \$9,940 be budgeted for Chamber funding to be used to cover insurance for parade at Farmers Day and Christmas, bands for Crank Up Coats, candy for Treat Street and portable restrooms at events. He conveyed that the Chamber Board was disappointed when funding was cut from \$2,000 to \$800 last year, and after reviewing the matter, the Chamber Board determined that not carrying forward with the events and activities would be a disservice to the community.

Debbie Cann of 8122 Maude Stewart Rd, Fuquay Varina, NC stated that she was the current Coats Chamber of Commerce Vice-President and owner of Santa and Friends which had been serving as an outreach ministry in the Coats community for thirty years. She stressed that she was an example that you do not have to live in the city limits and pay taxes to love and support the community and asked that the Board provide the requested financial support as proposed from the Chamber.

Lynn Plessinger of 202 Remington Dr indicated that the current Town website was difficult to navigate and find information and lacked updated information. She also requested that Town meetings be livestreamed.

Joan Harmon of 1390 Abattoir Rd reiterated the previous concern regarding the Town website and added a request that events be on calendar, Planning Board meeting agenda be shown and the entire agenda packet for meetings be added to website. She noted that the website was especially difficult to view on a phone.

Don Plessinger of 202 Remington Dr expressed interest in the agenda item regarding food trucks. He offered his experience as a food truck owner in assisting the Board if they were going to consider food trucks in town.

Daniel Thornton of 1936 Chic Ennis Rd announced the ribbon cutting ceremony for Herring Residential at 320 E Stewart St tomorrow morning from 11:00am to 1:00pm.

Ben Dixon of 1052 Old Stage Rd responded to the comments regarding the delinquent properties in town and stated that they were moving forward trying to clean stuff up and get it back to where it was supposed to be.

Adam Dean of 105 E Washington St added that there were issues with some of the tenants, but they were in the process and served two eviction notices today. He noted that he and his wife, Alicia, were working on this full-time.

Leeann Westbrook of 225 Jeep Ln, Angier NC shared that she just put a new blessing box near the Community Center.

Allen Faircloth of Benson NC and business owner at 16 E Main St in Coats pleaded that something be done about the website. He also asked in regards to the revitalization grant that the Board and citizens define revitalization with something that would give a target now that could be aimed at and worked toward.

Mayor Coats closed the Public Forum after hearing no one else.

III. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approval of Minutes – February 8, 2024
- B. Approval of Attorney Bill – Services Rendered February 1-29, 2024
- C. Review of Financial Statement

RESOLVED, to approve Consent Agenda.

MOTION BY: Commissioner Jerry Beasley

SECOND BY: Mayor Pro Tem Marc Powell

APPROVED: Unanimously Approved

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Water Systems Improvement Project & GPO Budget Amendment

Council voted to proceed with the entire replacement project and the Resolution of Tentative Award last month for the amount of \$1,275,500 to TA Loving Company and committed \$542,525 of local funds which was the amount over budget, so the Grant Project Ordinance needed to be amended accordingly.

Town Manager Nick Holcomb noted that the numbers used last month regarding contingencies were best guessed based on being pretty certain there would not be any rock and less engineering and oversight would be necessary due to using a quality contractor.

The Notice to Award had been given by the State and could now be executed by the Town to send to the Contractor along with all contract execution documents.

RESOLVED, to approve transfer of \$542,525 from the Water Fund to the Water Capital Project Fund and budget amendment.

MOTION BY: Commissioner Jerry Beasley

SECOND BY: Mayor Pro Tem Marc Powell

APPROVED: Unanimously Approved

B. Water Meter Project

Town Manager Holcomb informed the Board that payment in the amount of \$197,764.89 was due for meters that had been delivered throughout the month of February. He gave an update on the latest installation dates starting with the larger sized meters in mid-April and anticipating the start of the three-quarter inch residential meters in May with an expectation of completion before June 30 which meant the project could be completed within this budget year and could be run through the operational budget without the need to setup a capital project. A budget amendment in the amount of \$487,561 from Water Fund Balance to the Operating Budget would be needed.

Town Manager Holcomb relayed that he had been given a guarantee that 97% of the project would be complete before June 30 and would be covered by the requested budget amendment amount. He communicated that some loose ends could lag into next fiscal year such as the need for labor for corrections and tweaking of installation.

Mayor Pro Tem Marc Powell asked if meter installation would be done for all existing houses or all existing lots. Town Manager Holcomb explained that they worked off the data received from Harnett County's billing system which showed 1,350 accounts that had ever been created. Public Works worked off of that number taking into account the lots that no longer had a house or places where meters had not been active in 15 years or more and arrived at a need of 1,259; but in terms of hitting the exact number, it wasn't possible due to not knowing how many new accounts could come in the next three months.

Commissioner Jerry Beasley asked for confirmation that this money was already sitting in the Water Fund account. Town Manager Holcomb reminded the Board that we knew this was coming so when the Board decided to transfer the portion of recognized revenue from the ARP funds for LEO revenue replacement to the Water Fund last April it was with the intent to fund this project. Commissioner Beasley inquired about what account it was in. Town Manager Holcomb explained that it was in the water fund balance and would be moved to the operating budget. Finance Director Connie Lassiter added that the specific Water Fund operating line items targeted would be Unappropriated Surplus (Revenue) and Capital Improvement Plan (Expenditure).

Town Manager Holcomb mentioned that there would be future invoices for this project over the next three months that would be over the \$5,000 threshold that required Board approval for payment and suggested that the invoices be placed on the Consent Agenda since it was a known amount of money to cover the whole project.

RESOLVED, to transfer of \$487,561 for the budget amendment.

MOTION BY: Commissioner Jerry Beasley

SECOND BY: Commissioner Kelvin Gilbert

APPROVED: Unanimously Approved

RESOLVED, to pay the bill of \$197,764.89.

MOTION BY: Commissioner Jerry Beasley

SECOND BY: Commissioner Kelvin Gilbert

APPROVED: Unanimously Approved

Commissioner Kelvin Gilbert inquired if a motion was needed for placing approval of future payments on the Consent Agenda. Town Manager Holcomb responded that if it was acceptable it could be placed on the Consent Agenda and the Board would have the option to move it to an agenda item if discussion was needed. There was a general consensus of the Board to place future invoices for the project on the Consent Agenda.

C. Strategy for Downtown Revitalization Grant

Town Manager Holcomb recounted a few of the details regarding the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan that was developed utilizing a \$46,000 USDA grant that involved a lot of surveys and outreach at community events; talking to people walking down the street about what they cared about and wanted to see downtown; and meetings with property owners, business owners, Chamber of Commerce, Planning Board and Town Board which resulted in a good amount of public input. This professional plan allowed the Mayor to shop and promote with our elected officials to receive an earmark of \$500,000 through the State budget for a Downtown Revitalization Project based off the streetscape plan. Estimated cost would be around \$5 Million to complete the full blown streetscape project, and we were only awarded 10% of that amount. Being that we were awarded a very large amount of money that wasn't enough for the entire plan, we are forced to find a bit of the plan to get started on. Town Manager Holcomb summarized the following potential options:

Option 1 - Aesthetic Improvements

- Intended to generate a cosmetic only plan to improve overall aesthetics of Main St
- Includes benches, trash cans, planters, landscaping, lighting along Main St and edge of parking lot
- Town-owned building façade improvements (painting, lighting, signage)
- Downtown parking improvements
- \$500,000 would go a long way and be very visible.
- Would not inhibit any major streetscape construction in the future.

Option 2 – Square Renovation

- Objective would be to generate construction documents and general contractor bids for renovation of Farmers Corner parking lot into a true downtown greenspace
- Would create pedestrian greenspace with a feature such as a fountain, sculpture or shelter
- Good standalone project that could be designed and implemented within the \$500,000 budget

Option 3 – Streetscape Expansion

- Purpose to generate construction documents and general contractor bids for implementing a section of the downtown plan
- Would expand Railroad St (2-3 blocks from Main St) with curbing, parallel parking, street trees and sidewalk infrastructure
- Most practical for long range planning
- Would require the most money for design and engineering
- Least exciting of the three visually

Town Manager Holcomb emphasized the need for a plan that could be put out to bid to a general contractor that could produce a turnkey project and noted that a half million dollar project was on a scale that he could not be the head designer and contractor.

Commissioner Beasley inquired about time limit to complete project and mentioned that Option 3 was in keeping with the streetscape plan but expressed waterlines were going on Railroad St which would have two projects going on there.

Town Manager Holcomb explained that the \$500,000 was only an earmark and not a grant so there was no official timeline yet. He noted that the survey data, underground data and utility data we would have for the waterline project would give a head start on paying for and producing construction documents for Option 3 on Railroad St.

Commissioner Beasley mentioned that Option 3 would add more parking and trees on both sides of Railroad for a couple of blocks. He inferred that a decision didn't have to be made tonight.

Town Manager Holcomb clarified that he was looking for some direction from the Board so that he could inform the producers of the streetscape plan at WithersRavenel and ask how to approach and proceed with the option of choice.

Commissioner Kelvin Gilbert acknowledged and agreed with the commentary during the Public Forum on this topic and opined that he would like to see something now; so if it was possible to have someone add beauty, let's do it now. He was in favor of Option 1 because it would allow something that could be seen this year.

Commissioner Shirley Allen echoed the desire for Option 1 and added that it would make things look neater and cleaner.

Mayor Pro Tem Powell expressed that he had leaned toward Option 3 for Railroad St but after hearing the Public Forum comments from business owners the best bet would be Option 1 which provided to do something we could get now.

Commissioner Beasley admitted all three options were good options. He warned that Main St was a State maintained street and nothing could be done to the actual street, but we could do some things to the sidewalk as well as plant trees and add trash cans as long as we stay out of the street.

Town Manager Holcomb pointed out that building facade improvements on town owned buildings was included in Option 1. He alluded to the comment made in the Public Forum and stressed that this State earmark could not be used for improvements to private property. He went on to say that there were grant processes that a town could implement using public funds.

Commissioner Beasley called attention to a piece of town-owned property further down on Main St that was overgrown and suggested potential use as a picnic area park space if cleaned up.

Mayor Coats asked if WithersRavenel would have to be used for the project. Town Manager Holcomb indicated that he was open to the Boards input. Option 1 was much less intensive on

design and engineering, but some type of general layout site plan by a professional would be important to have.

Mayor Chris Coats called for a five minute recess.

RESOLVED, to recess for five minutes.

MOTION BY: Commissioner Jerry Beasley

SECOND BY: Mayor Pro Tem Marc Powell

APPROVED: Unanimously Approved

Recessed at 8:10 p.m. and reconvened at 8:15 p.m.

D. McKinley Point Fee – Consideration of Food Trucks

Town Manager Nick Holcomb introduced the idea of food trucks being allowed to operate at McKinley Point and if so, establishing associated rules.

Discussion included the following:

- Effect on established restaurants
- Potential for more food options
- Concern for lack of parking at that location
- Alternate location at the park

No action was taken.

V. MANAGER & COMMITTEE REPORT

Town Manager Nick Holcomb updated the Board on the following:

- CAMPO still sought comments from the town regarding updates to the MOU; final approved copy was expected to be completed next month
- Public Hearing for requested rezoning would be April 11; signage and mailings would go out next week; Planning Board met last week to follow up on their motion to deny with a written consistency statement that focused on traffic carrying capacity concerns and access for traffic as well as increasing collaboration with DOT to work on transportation plans for different corridors to make sure it lined up with our future land use plan
- Order to demolish 166 E J St would be carried forth prior to April 1st as legally it could have been done back in November; very dangerous situation now; original proposal would change, depending on increase and availability in the line item a special meeting might be needed before the April meeting or if close to original it could be an update in the Consent Agenda
- Budget Work Session would be March 21 at 6:30 p.m. for FY24-25 operating budget

Mayor Chris Coats read aloud a letter of resignation from Commissioner Allen Mosby.

Public Works Director Rodney Pleasant informed the Board that they had worked on cleaning out culvert pipes.

Police Chief Ken Storicks recognized Officer Kolaya and Officer Hawkins for their fundraising efforts with the Special Olympics. He displayed the two plaques received for raising over \$7,000 and for being the top new agency for Special Olympics fund raising. He reported that a Coffee with a Cop event would be held Saturday from 9:00 a.m. until 11 a.m. at Cornerstone.

Parks & Recreation Director Mike Collins referred to the monthly report submitted to the Board regarding youth participants and noted that the amount received from the County would be much larger this year. He commented on the issue of lack of parking and the need for an officer at the park to direct traffic during events.

Mayor Chris Coats encouraged everyone to participate in the Harnett County Street Sweep in April and noted that information was available on the Harnett County website.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Chris Coats called for a motion to adjourn.

RESOLVED, to adjourn.


MOTION BY: Mayor Pro Tem Marc Powell

SECOND BY: Commissioner Kelvin Gilbert

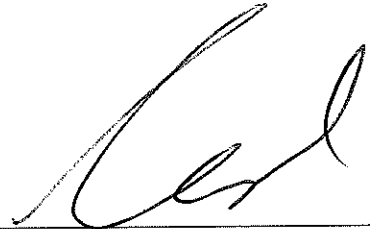
APPROVED: Unanimously Approved

Meeting adjourned at 9:01 p.m.

The attached documents of reference are incorporated herewith and are hereby made a part of these minutes.



Connie Lassiter, Town Clerk



Chris Coats, Mayor