

Walter M. Gardner, Jr.
Mayor

John Freeman
Administrator

TOWN OF WARRENTON
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February 8, 2010 Board of Commissioners Minutes

The February 8, 2010 meeting of the Town of Warrenton Board of Commissioners was held at the Warrenton Town Hall.

Those present were:

Mayor Walter M. Gardner, Jr.
Commissioner Jules Banzet
Commissioner John Blalock
Commissioner Robert Davie
Commissioner John Mooring
Commissioner Mary Hunter
Commissioner Audrey Tippet

John Freeman, Town Administrator
Town Attorney Mitch Styers
Public Works Director Bill Perkinson
Police Chief John Younts
Jennifer Harris, Warren Record

Absent: Commissioner and Mayor Pro Tem Woody King

Mayor Gardner called the meeting to order at 7:00pm. He then presented the proposed agenda for approval. Commissioner Blalock requested that a closed session be added to discuss a personnel matter. With that addition Commissioner Mooring moved to approve the proposed agenda; Commissioner Banzet seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Mayor Gardner then presented the minutes from the meeting of January 11, 2010 for approval. Commissioner Mooring moved that the minutes be approved; the motion was seconded by Commissioner Banzet and carried unanimously.

Public Comments

No members of the general public were in attendance or signed up to speak.

Committee Reports

Finance Report

Commissioner Hunter had reviewed the January checks in excess of \$10,000 and reported them appropriate. They were \$11,556.87 to MIT for the monthly cost of health insurance and \$12,155.00 to AECOM, which was a reimbursable grant payment for the Clean Water Management Trust Fund.

She then asked Mr. Freeman for the monthly financial report. He reported that a problem with posting in the management software that resulted in overstating January expenses, but even with that issue the cash flow position had improved by \$28,000 overall. He did draw attention to several specific expenses that increased January expenses. In Administration the commission paid for tax collection was high at \$2851 as it reflected the

highest month for tax collections. The one-time cost of the fall election was \$2975 was \$475 more than budgeted because the Board of Elections unexpectedly opened a second voting precinct location; this had not been the case in the past but apparently should have been as each precinct is supposed to have its own voting location. Also in Administration there was an expense of \$3000 to a contingency auditor who found more than \$6000 of federal gasoline taxes that were reimbursable; a contingency auditor reviews operations and receives half of reimbursements and savings that the Town would not otherwise find. Commissioner Mooring inquired about several vendors on the payables report list, including Com Data (provider of the Town Mastercard credit card) and Harris Enterprises. Bill Perkinson explained that Harris provides a variety of specialized heavy equipment and electrical repairs for Public Works that are beyond the scope of the staff.

Human Resources/Information Technology

Commissioner Banzet referred to two proposed policy changes that had been included in the Board preparation packets.

The first policy proposal was for the extension of health benefits to employees averaging as little as 30 hours per week with the requirement that they had worked full time at least five years and the Town Administrator determined it to be advantageous to the Town. This would require a policy change because currently health and other benefits are available only to full time 40 hour per week employees. Commissioner Davie asked if a policy could be discretionary or whether it had to apply to everyone who qualified. Mr. Styers recommended that the Town Administrator could be allowed to reclassify that position as a thirty hour position so that it was clearly done for position and not individual. Commissioner Blalock asked if this would require additional personnel cost to replace those hours and Mr. Freeman explained that with the cross training that had been done in the last two years there was a small pool of employees who could perform the duties that only one could perform previously. This allows more flexibility in scheduling as two or three can be scheduled for busy periods in an area and just one for slower periods. This would allow more flexibility in scheduling, which is one of the main goals of the proposed change. It also would allow the Town to continue to have the advantage of experienced employees after they might otherwise have retired completely. Commissioner Mooring said he could support it if it was clear that the purpose was cost saving in addition to flexibility. Commissioner Blalock moved that the policy be adopted with the recommendation made by Mr. Styers; Commissioner Tippett seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

The second proposed policy is to prohibit smoking in buildings and vehicles owned or maintained by the Town. Mr. Freeman explained it was not as restrictive as the state policy as it allows smoking outdoors. Mayor Gardner suggested that “smoke-free” be changed to “tobacco-free” to include chewing which would be undesirable around the public or other employees. Following some discussion about personal rights, Commissioner Blalock moved that the policy be adopted with the change suggested by Mayor Gardner; Commissioner Banzet seconded the motion which passed 5 to 1 with Commissioner Mooring casting the negative vote.

Referring to the tour of the Waste Water Treatment Plant on January 28, Commissioner Banzet expressed his appreciation to Director Bill Perkinson and his staff for the magnificent job of maintaining equipment that had lived beyond its useful life. Mayor Gardner added that Perkinson and staff had made a great presentation for the commissioners of Warrenton, Norlina and Warren County who had attended the tour.

Public Safety

Commissioner Blalock turned to Chief Younts for a review of the monthly activity report. Mr. Blalock noted that the numbers were down and asked if that was a positive sign. Chief Younts answered that it was mainly due to the weather, saying that cold weather had the same effect last year.

Commissioner Blalock reported that the Fire Department had received its new fire engine the previous Wednesday, and that it would be in service after training had been completed. The cost was nearly \$300,000 of which federal funds paid approximately \$260,000.

Mr. Freeman reported that Fire Marshall Chris Wright had no inspections to report for the month. Commissioner Blalock suggested that the Board consider specifying funds in the upcoming budget for hiring certified inspectors that the Town could call on as needed, to relieve the county fire marshal of the inspections requested and required by the Town but which his work load does not allow. Commissioner Mooring said that both county and Town could be liable for not inspecting buildings should they burn. Mr. Styers suggested that the fire department and Town might obtain a grant for training, though Mayor (and Fire Chief) Gardner said that cost was not the major issue. Mr. Styers further suggested that as the Town already had a contract with the fire department it could pay an additional fee for qualified fire department members to conduct inspections. Commissioner Davie asked if fire fighters might be interested in obtaining the required certification but Mr. Gardner said that it might be easier for the Town to hire someone as the fire fighters are all volunteer. Mr. Styers said a fee structure would need to be adopted, and could follow that established by the county. Mr. Mooring asked that the topic be included on the next meeting agenda.

Revitalization/Historical

In the absence of Commissioner King Mr. Freeman reported on behalf of the Revitalization Committee. He said the committee continued to work on the next event, Springfest on courthouse square, in conjunction with the county for County Government Week. The committee also continued its discussion of long range planning and was investigating several programs that could serve as a template for taking the initiative in bringing a group together to develop a vision of Warrenton's future.

Related to that Mr. Freeman also reported on having submitted a pre-application for a USDA revolving loan fund, the concept of which would be renovation of architectural elements such facades and historic interiors in the downtown business district. Commissioner Davie had researched available grants and assisted with the pre-application. Freeman stressed that Board approval would be sought should this pre-application be approved and a formal application be requested. In answer to Mr. Mooring's question he said the pre-application had been submitted with no offer of matching funds; while matching funds would gain more points in the review process, the fact that it would be a revolving loan fund would help offset that. In answer to Mr. Blalock's question he said that interest charged would be available to help defray the cost of administering the program or to lend out. Commissioner Tippett asked if there were strings attached and Mr. Freeman answered that there were not from USDA but that the Board would set the requirements for lending the funds.

Beautification/Facilities

Commissioner Tippett addressed the question of part time or contract fire inspectors by suggesting that the idea be extended to building inspections as well. She said it has sometimes been a problem to have buildings inspected and it would be good to be able to on an as-needed basis. She had spoken with the code enforcement office in Raleigh and had been told that they could supply the names of certified inspectors. Mr. Styers advised that it might be practical to have code enforcement rather than building inspections which would be much more complicated and would be a full time job. Commissioner Mooring asked if a part time code enforcement person would be an employee and Mr. Freeman answered that it would probably be handled as a professional service. Commissioner Davie asked about the comparison of fire and building inspectors, and Mayor Gardner summarized it by saying that fire inspections deal with life threatening issues. For instance, they would be concerned about clearance in front of an electrical panel box but not about how it was wired. Mr. Styers said that building inspections only take place when there is a change, unless it is a matter of condemnation or a clear, probable (not just potential) danger.

Mr. Freeman reported that he had received two quotes on replacing the Town Hall roof, and had found them helpful in learning more about what would be required. Commissioner Mooring asked if it had been bid out (no) or would be (yes). Mr. Freeman said that the services of an architect or engineer would probably be required to write the requirements and bids, and that the process was still at the information gathering stage.

Mr. Freeman said that the Citizens Advisory Board had nominated two citizens willing to serve and replace the two current commissioner members. They are Mary Raiford and Annette Silver. Commissioner Banzet moved that their nominations be accepted and that they replace Commissioners Tippet and Hunter; Commissioner Mooring seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Commissioner Tippet then commended the Town Public Works employees who had done a great job to keep up with everything during the heavy snow of the previous week and the heavy rain during the weekend.

Public Works

Commissioner Davie asked Bill Perkinson for his report. Mr. Perkinson said that the new work trucks had been purchased and were at Granville Communications for the installation of safety lighting and were expected to be in service in the next week or two. He reported that the grant-funded video project of the sewer collection system might start the next day and should help identify problem areas.

He reported that the heavy rain of the previous weekend had presented a challenge for the department, and four employees were out until 7:00am Saturday morning. Haulers had to be called in at midnight to pump out the Riggans pump station to avoid a spill, and two trucks pumped and hauled continuously for eight hours. While challenging, there were no spills and the plant remained biologically intact. While he had hoped the worst was over, on Sunday morning an inspection discovered the main aerator rotor in the oxidation ditch had collapsed due to corrosion of its steel structure. Staff planned to move the rotor from the second oxidation ditch, rebuild or replace bearings and motor, and use it until plant rehabilitation could replace it. This is a heavy duty repair that involves a large crane and will cost about \$10,000. A new rotor, if available, would take some months to be delivered and would cost substantially more. Commissioner Blalock observed that one problem with obtaining grants for critical repairs had been that good management had prevented any violations.

Commissioner Davie asked what could be done to relieve the necessity of pumping out the Riggans pump station at every heavy rain event and Mr. Perkinson said that retention would be improved with the addition of a second wet well which is part of the current grant project. That would help but the main problem is that the out-flow line from the pump station is too small to handle the volume and replacing the line would be a very expensive project.

Among the regular activities Mr. Perkinson reported that the grit pump had been repaired as projected in the previous month report, and that the digester mixer had failed when the pump burned out. That repair was expected to be completed this day at a cost of about \$7500. Mr. Perkinson confirmed Mayor Gardner's estimate that repairs might run \$20,000 in February, and Mayor Gardner commended the staff for doing a good job with limited equipment.

Commissioner Blalock inquired about the cost of a snow plow, and Mr. Perkinson said that he would investigate a blade for the 4wd Kioti tractor. Commissioner Mooring asked about the plow that was part of the purchase of the DOT dump truck. Mr. Freeman said it was the wrong plow and did not fit the truck and had been left in Durham. Mr. Mooring asked if it might have some value or could be converted. Mayor Gardner suggested that DOT might be able to provide a used plow as the Town truck had been purchased from DOT. Mr. Perkinson said he would look into it but that the tractor was a better piece of equipment for plowing.

Commissioner Mooring asked Chief Younts if any streets had been closed during the snow storm, and he said Hall Street had been closed for sledding, and East Franklin because of ice at the intersection.

Zoning

Commissioner Mooring said he had nothing to report at this meeting.

Unfinished Business

Mr. Freeman reviewed that at its July 2009 meeting the Board of Commissioners had approved the Animal Sanitation Ordinance 90.09 that required that dog owners pick up and properly dispose of their pets' feces. At the time collection boxes were discussed but a decision about installing them was postponed to see if a problem remained following the passing of the ordinance. Commissioner Mooring had requested that the question be followed up as an item on the agenda. Commissioner Blalock asked if it had been a problem since and Mr. Mooring said that the problem had been serious enough to move the Board to act on the ordinance. Both Commissioners Mooring and Banzet reported seeing dog walkers with collection bags, but Mr. Mooring said that he did not see the harm in installing the boxes, especially since they had been donated and the ordinance passed. The consensus was that they should be installed in the central business district. There followed some discussion about the problem of strays and Mayor Gardner suggested that animal control be called to trap them.

New Business

The main items of New Business were requests involving reserved parking places. On behalf of the District Court Judge and District Attorney, Clerk of the Court Richard Hunter had requested that their reserved parking spaces be moved from Front Street in front of the county manager's office to West Macon Street. Renovation of the courthouse would make it more convenient and Front Street was not particularly safe to exit. Commissioner Banzet said that the Superior Court judge had a reserved space in the county manager's lot next to the sheriff. Mr. Freeman said that that part of Front Street was not supposed to allow parking and in fact the curb was painted yellow, and that there are 10 parking spaces on West Macon of which four are reserved for residents. There was some discussion about changing two of those to reserved for judge and district attorney from 9:00-5:00 and for the residents other times. Commissioner Blalock did not favor the dual use because residents would have to move their vehicles during the day. Mr. Styers said that the current signs should not be changed without notifying the residents first. He also said that judges enter the courthouse through the regular doors, and Commissioner Banzet suggested they use the county lot. Commissioner Mooring said that there should not be any additional reserved spaces on Macon as there were only six available now, and Mayor Gardner summarized the consensus as leaving the spaces as they are with the recommendation that the two requested spaces be located in the county manager's lot.

The second request for a reserved space was by the resident of 211 Graham Street, located next to the Crenshaw dental office. The resident reports that combination of employees and patients often leaves her without a place to park in front of her house, which is made more difficult by her physical limitations. Mr. Freeman said two considerations are that a reserved space would push the parking problem down Graham Street and that zoning should have required Dr. Crenshaw to provide off-street parking when his office was expanded in 1998. Mr. Freeman said he had spoken with Dr. Crenshaw who was very cooperative but had no solution. He said he had investigated the purchase of the lot behind the post office, and there followed discussion about the possibility of the Town purchasing or leasing the lot. With questions about cost and potential liability issues unresolved it was decided to table the request pending more information.

Mr. Freeman presented a request from James West at 211 North Main Street for a sewer adjustment for water used when a line had frozen and burst in his yard. The amount of the requested adjustment was \$132.03. Commissioner Blalock moved that this adjustment be approved; Commissioner Banzet seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Resolutions

Mayor Gardner presented a financing resolution that confirmed the specifics of the First Citizens Bank loan approved at the previous Board meeting for the purchase of two work trucks for Public Works. This is required by the Bank although the loan had already been made. Commissioner Mooring voiced the concern expressed at the previous meeting that out-of-town customers bear the cost, and Mr. Freeman said that would be the case. Commissioner Davie told the Board that Mr. Freeman had sought grant funding available through the USDA and found it did not apply for these vehicles, as other funding was possible at reasonable rates. Commissioner Blalock moved to approve the resolution; Commissioner Banzet seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Announcements

There were no announcements.

At 8:35pm Commissioner Banzet moved that the Board go into Closed Session; Commissioner Blalock seconded the motion which passed unanimously. At 8:43 Commissioner Banzet moved to return to open session, Commissioner Tippett seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

There being no further business Commissioner Banzet moved to adjourn. Commissioner Mooring seconded the motion which passed unanimously. Mayor Gardner declared the meeting adjourned at 8:45pm.

Respectfully submitted,

John Freeman
Town Administrator