

07/18/2023

The Board of Commissioners of the Town of Wade met in regular session July 11, 2023, at 7:00 P.M. at the Wade Town Hall.

Board Present

Commissioner Johnny Lanthorn
Commissioner George Strater
Commissioner Kevin Herring
Commissioner Jennifer Weaver

Board Absent

Mayor Joseph Dixon
Commissioner Johnny Sawyer

Visitors

Mr. Thomas Neville, Town Attorney
Mr. Victor D'Amato, NC Department of Environmental Quality
Mr. Al Wheatley, Legislative Assistant, Representative Diane Wheatley
1 Wade Citizen

Mayor Pro Tempore Strater called the meeting to order and opened with prayer.

Agenda Adoption

Commissioner Lanthorn made a motion seconded by Commissioner Herring to adopt the agenda as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Minutes

Commissioner Herring made a motion seconded by Commissioner Lanthorn to approve the Minutes of the June 13, 2023, public hearing & regular session. The motion passed unanimously.

Financial Reports

Commissioner Lanthorn made a motion seconded by Commissioner Herring to approve the Reports as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Water Department

Board Members reviewed the Report and Commissioner Lanthorn made a motion to approve the Report as presented. Commissioner Herring seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Business Items

Speakers from the Floor

Mayor Pro Tempore Strater informed the Board that Mr. Al Wheatley legislative assistant for Representative Diane Wheatley, had signed up to address the Board under the Speakers from the Floor agenda item. Mr. Wheatley informed the Board that the budget negotiations for the State budget had languished, however, Governor Cooper was successful in getting the expansion of Medicare included in the budget. Mr. Wheatley stated that there would be a signed budget for the new year based on current negotiations. He informed the Board that Representative Wheatley was successful in bringing funds back to the area and currently was requesting \$165,051.78 for the Town of Wade for the purchase of generators for the Water System. He explained that funding

for the budget would be considered first, and then individual requests would be taken into consideration. Mr. Wheatley thanked the Board and Town for supporting Representative Wheatley. He stated that Representative Wheatley would always be available to assist the Town or citizens of Cumberland County. Commissioner Lanthorn stated that the project for the Rhodes Pond dam was supposed to be completed and was wondering about the status of filling the pond. Mr. Wheatley agreed to get information regarding Rhodes Pond and get back to the Town.

Water System Distressed Designation

Mayor Pro Tempore Strater reminded the Board that at the June meeting there was discussion regarding the possibility of the Town's Water System receiving a distressed designation and so the Board requested that Mr. Victor D'Amato come to July meeting to assist Board Members with making a decision regarding the matter. Mr. Victor D'Amato informed the Board that the Department of Environmental Quality was indifferent to the Board's decision regarding the designation and was merely available to answer any questions. He explained that the legislature had tried to focus on the viability of water and wastewater systems and that there were currently 500 local government units with systems. He stated that many of the systems were small and facing similar issues and concerns as Wade. Mr. D'Amato explained that the State Water Infrastructure Authority focused on systems so that funding would not be given to systems that were not good stewards of the money. He proceeded to explain the definition of a viable system and that if a system was distressed his agency would not level fines but would merely be there with funding to help the system get back on track. Mr. D'Amato stated that having access to the funding set aside by the State was a benefit from being designated as distressed and would allow the Town to be eligible for \$15,000,000 in grants. He informed the Board that the overall idea behind the program was to get a system to be self-sustaining without having to rely on grants.

Mr. D'Amato then explained the statutory obligations of the designation such as an asset inventory for the system. He stated that there was a grant available to do the assessment and this would let the state know the status of the system and how to move forward. He informed the Board that a part of the inventory assessment would include a rate study, but the Town would not be obligated to put the rates into effect. He stated that there would be required utility management training for staff and the Board and if distressed other funding programs would score Town projects with a higher score. Mr. D'Amato informed the Board that another part of the designation would be to develop plans such as a short-term action plan, a capital improvement plan as well as long-term plans such as partnering or sharing resources with other systems. He explained that being distressed should not cost the Town any money but should bring resources to the Town that will look out for the Town.

He explained that annually all systems are reviewed and scored and that for the current year the Town's score was 8 so the score is on the border of not being distressed for some of the categories. Mr. D'Amato stated that based on this fact the Town could choose to do nothing now and see what happens when the system was scored again after the current audit. He stated that if the same score or higher was received the Water System would be deemed distressed. He stated that the other options would be to try and gather data to get the score of 8 lowered or approve a Resolution which would immediately designate the system as distressed. There was a general discussion concerning the information presented and the options that were available to the Town. Attorney Thomas

Neville questioned the scoring methodology and how being designated would or would not assist the Town in regard to scoring. Commissioner Strater questioned how many other Towns would be competing for the grant funds if designated. Mr. D'Amato explained that 130 units were currently designated as distressed. He stated that there would be no competition for the Asset Inventory Grant, however it would be very competitive for funding for other projects. He stated that funding would reflect the priorities of the State Water Authority. There was a general discussion concerning how the Town may not score well for funding because there were not significant problems with the system and the funds could not be used for expansion of the system. Commissioner Weaver questioned if the Town did not complete the obligations or raise the rates that were determined in the rate study would the Town lose the chance for funding. Attorney Thomas Neville stated that he could see the benefits of being distressed on the money side; however, on the downside because of the Town's unique situation would volunteering to be distressed and receiving no benefit be what is best for the Town. Mr. D'Amato stated that the Town may want to contact other units that were listed as distressed to get additional information and ideas. Attorney Thomas Neville questioned if there was an agency or consultant that could look at the Town's scoring data to see where points could be gained or lost. Mr. D'Amato stated that there were organizations such as NC Rural Water, UNC Environmental Finance Center & SERCAP as well as engineering firms that could assist the Town.

Commissioners Lanthorn and Weaver stated that they could not see any benefit to the Town voluntarily requesting a distressed designation. A general discussion was held regarding the issue. Commissioner Lanthorn made a motion to not take any action regarding the distressed designation and instead wait until the 2022-2023 audit was reviewed to see how the score would be updated. Commissioner Herring seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Committee Reports

Beautification – Mayor Pro Tempore Strater stated that he had received complaints about the appearance of the post office. He stated that to him it was a bad reflection on the Town. Town Clerk Cindy Burchett stated that she felt the change in appearance was due to a change in post office management. Mrs. Burchett agreed to write a letter to the Postmaster General. Commissioner Herring stated that he was also concerned about the overgrown yards and properties within Town. Attorney Thomas Neville stated that this matter was one of the issues turned over to the County and that someone with the Town or even a private citizen could complain to the County to hopefully get results. Commissioner Weaver stated that now may be a good time to implement the idea of recognizing homeowners with a Yard of the Month designation.

Park – Commissioner Weaver stated that she felt it was important to make sure that all the gates at the Park and Community Center were closed properly. Commissioner Herring questioned if the Board was going to make another offer on the property adjacent to the Park. Board Members held a general discussion and agreed to stick to the last offer of \$35,000. Commissioner Weaver stated that people were showing interest in a Community Yard Sale in September. Board Members also discussed the issue of having a food truck event in Town on Friday nights. Commissioner Lanthorn stated that he felt that the Founder's Day Committee should work with the food truck and yard sale ideas and plans.

Streets – No report was presented.

Announcements

Commissioner Weaver stated that she would like for the Town to work more closely with and in support of District 7 Elementary. Board Members discussed the issue. Town Clerk Cindy Burchett stated that one of the teachers had reached out about the Town once again sponsoring the Character Education Awards. Mrs. Burchett explained that the Town had sponsored the award for many years but since COVID had not participated in any of the award ceremonies. Commissioner Weaver expressed the importance of working with the School and the Board of Education.

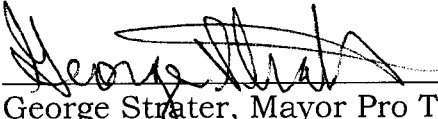
Commissioner Lanthorn informed the Board that the generators should be delivered to the Town Hall & wells on August 18th.

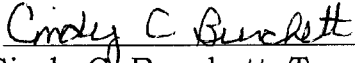
Town Clerk Cindy Burchett reminded Board Members that the filing period for the 2023 Election would end July 21st at 12:00 noon.

Adjournment

Commissioner Lanthorn made a motion seconded by Commissioner Herring to adjourn. The motion passed unanimously.

There being no further business the meeting adjourned.


George Strater, Mayor Pro Tempore


Cindy C. Burchett, Town Clerk