

Town of Pinetops
Board of Commissioners
Regular Monthly Meeting (Also available via Zoom)
Minutes
April 21, 2020
Pinetops Town Hall

Present. Present for the meeting were Mayor Brenda Harrell, Commissioners Donald Webb, Dennis Sugg, Oscar Mabry and Barbara Taylor. Mayor Pro-Tem Florence Pender was out of town but still able to participate in the meeting via Zoom.

Also in attendance. Town Administrator Natalie Bess, Finance Officer Tammy Keesler, Public Works Director Phil Webb, and Police Chief Stacy Harrell. Van Holland from the Tar River Times paper was also in attendance as well as the Town Attorney, Brian Pridgen who was present via Zoom.

A. Call to Order

Mayor Harrell called the April 21st meeting to order at 6.00p.m. The Mayor took a moment to welcome everyone that was present via Zoom.

B. Invocation

Invocation was given by Public Works Director, Phil Webb.

C. Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Harrell led the Pledge of Allegiance.

D. Proposed Agenda

Mayor Harrell called for a motion to approve the proposed agenda. Commissioner Taylor requested that a couple of past items be put back on the agenda for further discussion. The two items she wanted to add was (1) cleaning out of ditches and (2) Naming of Deputy Manning Street. Commissioner Sugg also asked that the Strategic Project Selection be included on the Agenda. Commissioner Taylor made a motion to approve the proposed agenda as amended. Commissioner Webb seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

E. Consent Agenda

Commissioner Mabry made a motion to approve the Regular Monthly Meeting minutes from March 3, 2020, the Special Call Meeting/Board Retreat minutes from March 6, 2020 and the Special Call Meeting minutes from March 17, 2020. Motion was seconded by Commissioner Sugg. Motion carried unanimously.

F. Public Comments

Mayor Harrell opened the public comment section to those citizens that had requested to speak. Administrator Bess told the board that she did not receive any calls or emails requesting to speak at this meeting. Any citizens wishing to speak had to call or email questions to the town by the allotted deadline. The public was not allowed to be physically present at the meeting due to the Governors Executive Order limiting the number allowed at public gatherings to no more than 10 people due to COVID-19.

G. Departmental Reports

1. **Police Department.** Chief Harrell read over the police report for the month of March. The total calls for the month was 1,890. The Chief told the board that he has 1 officer that has been released from training and is now back in rotation while another officer is awaiting paperwork from the State. Once this officer is completely released he will again have a full staff. The Chief reported that the department currently has 1 dispatcher out on sick leave and at this time is not sure when or if he will be able to return to work. Currently the position will be temporary to possibly turning into a full-time position if needed. Commissioner Taylor inquired as to how many employees are in the police department to which the Chief responded 7 officers and 4 dispatchers. The Chief took a few moments to discuss the issue of overtime pay for exempt employees who cap out at 100 hours. Currently these employees receive comp. time for excess hours. He went on to tell the board that he has already maxed out and the other 2 exempt officers have in the range of 60-70 hours respectively. He just wanted to make sure the board knew and was okay with issuing overtime to the exempt employees if warranted due to COVID-19. Officers are having to deal with enforcing the governors Stay at Home Order as well as having to monitor the playgrounds and trying to limit gatherings to no more than 10 as stated in the executive order. The town is also facing more domestic calls, dealing with kids being out of school and having to provide security to local stores as they receive shipments. The Chief reported that Pinetops currently has 6 confirmed cases of COVID-19. The Chief gave the board an update on the Justice Grant in which he is scheduled to receive reimbursements totaling \$1,497 for the purchase of digital cameras, Taser cartridges, and

Taser battery pack. Administrator Bess told the board that she is working with the Town Attorney on revising the Animal Control Ordinance. In the past the town did adopt the Edgecombe County Animal Control Ordinance but they have a newer, revised ordinance that Pinetops will need to adopt.

2. **Public Works Department.** (a) Phil Webb read over the water and sewer report for the month of March. The report shows the total million gallons of sewer flow and water discharge for the month. The sewer flow totaled 7.99 million gallons which averages to 275,000 gallons per day and the water discharge totaled 4.88 million gallons which averages to 157,000 gallons per day. He told the board that the town did receive a violation from the State for the month of February for exceeding permitted usage and could possibly be fined. He did check with Derek Smith from the Wooten Company to see if there were any funds available for preparing an Asset Inventory Plan for the Wastewater Treatment Plant. The town does qualify for a \$150,000 grant with a minimum match of 5% but could pay as much as \$7,500. This grant has a submittal deadline of September 30, 2020. The town also qualifies for another type of funding that has no deadline for submission but he doesn't know how much would be grant/match. The Town Administrator told the board that she would follow up on this to see if or what the match would be.
3. **Fire Department.** The board received a copy of the Fire report for the month of March. The Fire Chief was not present at this meeting. The total calls for the month of March was 9. The report consisted of In-Town Service Call = 1, Automatic Aid Fire Call = 1, and Medical Responder Calls = 7. Hours in Training & Meetings = 278. There were 7 smoke detectors distributed last month. The Fire Dept. worked with Public Works to get the fire siren and tornado warning siren back in service. All Pinetops FD members have been updated on the Edgecombe County Emergency Services Response Policy due to the current COVID-19 situation. Pinetops FD Medical Responders are provided PPE kits as well as additional higher grade respirators.
4. **Finance Officer.** Ms. Keesler gave the financial report for the month of March. The general fund had a negative balance of \$15,553.85 while the electric fund had a positive balance of \$74,580.75. The water/sewer fund also ended with a positive balance of \$4,135.17. She also presented the board with a Budget to Actual Report for the month as well as a Paid Check Report for March. Commissioner Sugg stated that they didn't receive these 2 reports so she told them she thought they had already received them but would make sure they do get a copy of both.

5. Town Administrator.

- a) The Town Administrator told the board that there has been 57 cases of COVID-19 in Edgecombe County and 1 death.
- b) Pinetops has been set up through the FEMA Portal so we would be eligible for any reimbursements if or when they may be disbursed. Commissioner Mabry reported that the Department of Transportation projects have been pushed back at this time which means Pinetops project is still on but moved way down on the list.
- c) The Town Hall lobby door is still closed due to COVID-19. We are not accepting credit card payments at this time but instead are urging customers to drop cash, checks, or money orders in an envelope through the slot on the door. The office is still operating under normal hours, Monday-Friday, 8.00 a.m. – 5.00 p.m. Office staff is being staggered at this time.
- d) The town's park and community building remain closed as per the governor executive order relating to public gatherings of no more than 10 people.
- e) Executive Order No. 124 as per Governor Cooper prohibits municipalities from charging late fees, cut-off fees, or disconnects of residential customers from the time frame covered in the executive order. When the order ends the customer can enter into a payment plan which will give customers six months to pay from the ending date of the order.

Administrator Bess told the board that there is a lot of reporting that has to be done in reference to these numbers. She also told the board that she had been on numerous zoom meetings and calls pertaining to the possible impacts of COVID-19 on the budget. There are questions as to whether adopt the proposed budget for next fiscal year or adopt an interim budget instead. There will be shortfalls in relation to state shared revenues and well as property tax loss. Many are beginning to look at hiring freezes, layoffs, no cost-of-living increases given as well as possibly having to cut benefits.
- f) Commissioner Mabry suggested that any open projects be left on the agenda even if no action is taken on them until they are closed. This way the board can keep updated on projects, know what the completion dates are and make sure that projects or discussions are not forgotten.
- g) Commissioner Mabry suggested contacting the barber shops, hair dressers, and nail salons in town to see if they have any ideas of how to open back up safely once the governor's order is released. He said he would welcome their feedback.
- h) Administrator Bess told the board she had no update at this time about the Long Term Planning offered through the NC Department of Commerce because their travel was suspended due to COVID-19.

- i) Commissioner Taylor stated that during the budget retreat the board discussed looking into adopting a policy that outlines how to rename town streets. The discussion was originally brought up because of the Deputy Manning Street Sign. The Town Attorney, Brian Pridgen was on the phone via Zoom to address this issue and to answer any other questions the board might have. The attorney told the board that he is currently working on drafting a policy to address this issue. Most policies would normally involve holding a public hearing but the board had the option to choose whether they wanted to include that. Commissioner Taylor stated that moving forward on renaming a street people would have to abide by the new policy. The attorney stated that we need to have a policy in place then decide how to proceed. The attorney told the board that they have two options. (1) Board didn't use policy before it was done so we don't have to use it now. Either leave sign as it is or remove it; board would need to vote whether to leave the sign as is or take it down. (2) Board can vote to create a new policy to abide by then moving forward anyone requesting a street name change would have to go by the new policy. The attorney suggested the board make a motion to vote on either using the current process or create a new one. Commissioner Mabry made a motion to instruct the town attorney to create a new policy for the town as it relates to renaming street signs going forward. Commissioner Webb seconded the motion. Motion was passed unanimously.
- j) Administrator Bess informed the board that the walkability signs are all up and in the near future there should be a magazine article on them.
- k) The Well #4 project is set to begin on May 4, 2020.
- l) Administrator Bess told the board that she had received all the asbestos reports back on the property scheduled for demolition. She reported that 315 Sally Jenkins tested hot which means there is some asbestos to remove. 204 S 4th Street tested clean while the other three properties only tested hot by the windows. The attorney told the board that it would be cheaper for the town if the fire department would do a control burn of the properties then the town would only have to pay for asbestos testing and debris removal. If the fire department can't do a control burn then the town will have to hire a demolition crew which will be more expensive. If the town goes this route then it can be bid out as a total project which may be a little cheaper. Administrator Bess told the board that she had received a referral from the attorney which was a demolition company used by the City of Wilson.
- m) Commissioner Taylor asked for an update on the other houses that were on the original demolition list; these were the ones originally extended. These houses were supposed to be repaired. Administrator Bess said she would follow up on this with the town attorney.

- n) Mayor Harrell informed the board that the tractor pull has been cancelled.
- o) Commissioner Mabry and Commissioner Sugg volunteered to head up the two strategic projects and hopefully will have updates to report by the next meeting. The current strategic projects consist of (1) storm water run-off and (2) wastewater treatment planning.

H. Items for Discussion

No items for discussion at this time.

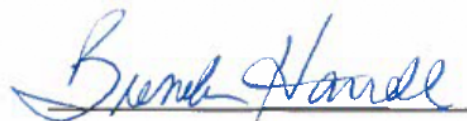
I. Items for Consideration

- A) **Audit Contract.** Commissioner Webb made a motion to hire Petway, Mills & Pearson Audit Firm to perform the audit for fiscal year ending June 30, 2020. The amount of the audit contract is \$15,500. Commissioner Mabry seconded the motion. Motion was passed unanimously.
- B) **2021 Tax Collection Agreement – Edgecombe County.** Administrator Bess presented the board with a tax collection agreement from Edgecombe County for tax year 2021. By signing this agreement it gives Edgecombe County authority to collect the 2021 property tax for the Town of Pinetops. Edgecombe County will charge the town 2% based on their collection rate for Pinetops. Commissioner Taylor made a motion to sign the 2021 tax collection agreement giving Edgecombe County authority to bill and collect property taxes for the Town of Pinetops. Commissioner Sugg seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.
- C) **Next Meeting.** Administrator Bess asked the board if they wanted to reschedule the next board meeting due to the fact that it is only two weeks from this one. The board decided to go ahead with the May meeting on the 5th as originally scheduled.

Adjournment

Motion made by Commissioner Webb and seconded by Commissioner Sugg to adjourn at 8:20 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.

Date, 5/5/2020



Mayor Brenda Harrell

ATTESTED,



Finance Officer/Town Clerk Tammy Keesler