



Minutes of Special Called Meeting March 28, 2023

The Board of Aldermen/Alderswomen for the Town of Fremont, NC held a Special Called Meeting at 11:00 a.m. on March 28, 2023. Present were:

W. Darron Flowers, Mayor
Joyce M. Artis, Mayor Pro tem
Beatrice Jones, Alderswoman
Keith L. Spivey, Alderman
Terry Futrelle, Alderswoman
Leroy Ruffin, Alderman
Annie Lewis, Alderswoman

Also in attendance were Town Administrator Tony Howell, Town Clerk Shannon Daly, Finance Officer Cathy Nichols, Public Works Director Brian Harvey, Chief Paul Moats, and Assistant Greg Bottoms.

Quorum Present: Yes

Call to Order: Mayor Flowers called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m.

Invocation: Alderman Ruffin gave the invocation.

Pledge of Allegiance: Alderswoman Lewis led all in attendance in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Agenda: Mayor Flowers asked to amend the agenda to include comments from the Mayor as item #1 under discussion. Alderman Ruffin asked to include a Daffodil Drop as item #4 under discussion. Mayor Flowers asked for a motion to approve the amended agenda. Mayor Pro tem Artis made the motion. Alderswoman Lewis seconded it. All were in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Discussion:

(1) Comments from the Mayor

Mayor Flowers said that a citizen visited him yesterday and wanted to know what she could do to appeal a decision concerning her utility bill. He said that he told her that she would have to bring it to the Board and that he would ask the Board today if they wanted to allow her to appeal the decision. The issue concerns a decision the Board made to

charge her for 2 years of estimated water and sewer usages after staff found that 4 years of usage had been used. The citizen had refused to make a payment arrangement and her utilities were disconnected. He instructed that if there was to be another decision made, Alderwoman Jones would need to recuse herself from the decision, being that she is a relative. Alderwoman Jones stated that she knew when she would need to recuse herself from this situation.

Alderwoman Jones had several questions for Mr. Howell and there was much discussion about the citizens' account and the events that have happened up until this point.

Alderwoman Jones made some remarks concerning utilities being cut off and Mrs. Daly stated that this is not something that she nor the staff enjoys doing. She said that they do not like being fussed at, cussed at, or threatened and stated that the Board has the authority to change the policy and do away with cut-offs. She said until the Board decided to change the policy, she along with the staff, will continue to do their jobs and carry out the wishes of the Board. She said they will not show favoritism and will treat all people the same. Mr. Harvey agreed, and stated that the public works staff does not enjoy doing cut-offs.

There was some discussion about the meeting that took place with the citizen, Mr. Howell, and Alderman Spivey at 9 a.m. this morning. It was stated that the utilities were turned back on after the citizen made a payment. Mrs. Daly said that the citizen would not commit to a payment arrangement in writing, until the Board would consider a settlement amount on the bill.

Alderman Ruffin said that if the citizen wants an arrangement then she needs to come in and talk with the Board to make the agreement. Mr. Howell asked if the Board wanted to give a settlement amount and Alderman Ruffin said that they had already cut the bill in half. Alderwoman Futrelle stated that we have to do what is right and what is fair. She stated to reduce it more seems unfair and to wipe out seems very unfair.

Mayor Flower stated that it is out of his hands now and any communication with the citizen and the Board would need to go through Mr. Howell.

Alderwoman Jones stated that she hopes that eventually we will be able to put locks on the water meters. Mr. Harvey said that we have the capability to do that now, but the reason we don't is because the locks are expensive and generally speaking people don't tamper with their water meter. He said if there is a question if someone is tampering with it or not tampering with it, they will put a lock on it. He said it is time consuming to put locks on or to take them off. He said if there is a water leak, especially in the middle of the night, it would take longer to turn off the water if you have to take the lock off. He said the ordinance states that the citizen has to have their own cutoff valve so that they can cut off their water in case of a water leak, but it is expensive for the citizens to do this.

Mr. Howell said Oscar Leon, the applicant that had an interview at 11:00 a.m., did not show up and he could not get in touch with him.

Mr. Howell stated that Mr. Harvey had a quote to repair a bar screen at Hillandale that cost \$30,272. He said that the bar screen is 20 years old and this is the first significant problem that we have had. There was some discussion about the bar screen. Mayor Pro tem Artis made a motion to accept the Fairfield Service Company of Indiana's quote of \$30,272, plus the cost of the supervisor that is needed on site to ensure that the work is done properly. Alderman Ruffin asked how much the cost would be for the supervisor and Mr. Harvey said around \$4,700 so the entire cost would be approximately \$35,000. Alderwoman Jones seconded it. All were in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Harvey left the meeting.

Recess:

Mayor Flowers called for a short recess at 12:02 p.m.

Call to Order:

Mayor Flowers called the meeting to order at 12:17 p.m.

(2) Budget for Fiscal Year of 2023/2024

Chief Moats gave the Police Department budget. His proposed budget for fiscal year 2023/2024 is \$398,352, which is an increase of \$20,594. These increases include salaries, fuel, and supplies. Chief Moats said that he keeps a check on his budget regularly and normally they are under budget each year.

Mayor Pro tem Artis stated that she appreciates Chief Moats for keeping an eye out on his budget and making sure he is not overspending.

Alderman Ruffin asked what will happen to the money left over in his budget this year and Chief Moats said that they are having to spend some funds on supplies, ammunition, and other things that have been used during COVID. He said they are trying to upgrade their firearms, but they will be trading in the old firearms on them. He said any other funds left over will go back to the fund balance at the end of the year. Alderman Ruffin said he would like to know how much that is and Chief Moats said he would let him know.

Alderwoman Futrelle said that she wanted to compliment Chief Moats and Assistant Chief Bottoms and said she only gets compliments from other citizens for the job the officers do.

Chief Moats said that they have acquired another speed sign through the Governor's Highway Safety program. He said they earn points throughout the year and Assistant Chief Bottoms monitors that and was able to get the speed sign using the points they have accumulated. He said so the speed sign was no cost to the Town.

Mayor Flowers, Chief Moats, and Assistant Chief Bottoms left the meeting.

Mr. Howell and Mrs. Nichols gave the Administration and the Governing Body expenses. The proposed budget for fiscal year 2023/2024 for Administration is \$365,765, which is an increase of \$99,336. Mrs. Nichols said that the salary and wages looks higher because there are some salaries that were added to that account, but there will be two salaries taken out and put in the water and sewer, and the electric departments. There is also a 5% increase for cost of living raise. Mrs. Nichols stated that the retirement expense will go up this year.

There was some discussion about the benefits that the Town offers its' employees and it was determined that this will be looked at when we update the personnel policy.

Other increases to the Administration budget is for telephone, insurance and bonds, and the company Christmas party.

Mayor Pro tem Artis stated that we needed to include the meal for the State of the Town Address and Mrs. Nichols said that the meals would need to be increased under Governing Body expenses.

Alderman Jones asked how much was budgeted for training and Mrs. Nichols said \$3,000. She said that she and Mayor Pro tem Artis registered for a class, but later found out that they were not registered because it was not paid for. Mrs. Daly suggested that the Board come up with a system if they want to attend a class and maybe call her and she will make sure they get registered and it gets paid.

There was some discussion about a raise for the Board and it was determined that a raise of 26% will be included in the budget. Alderman Jones said that it will be around a \$3,600 increase for the Board and Mayor's salaries.

Mr. Howell stated that we had someone interested in renting or purchasing the old ATV shop on Main Street, but he wasn't sure if the Board wanted to sell it or if they wanted to rent it. There was some discussion, but no decision was made.

Mrs. Daly stated that we have now presented all the expenses and at the next budget workshop, we can look at the difference in our revenues versus our expenses. She said there will be some ideas on how to increase the revenue, without increasing the utility rates. She said that she knows increasing the utility rates is a last resort, but we may have to increase them this year.

There was some discussion about the utility rates going up on the Town.

Mayor Pro tem Artis said that we should have a list of expenses for the Town for any event that we participate in. There was much discussion about getting a list of expenses from any organization that we donate to for our records. It was determined that Mrs. Nichols will need to keep an account of our expenses to include salaries, supplies, and

donations for all organizations that we help. It was also determined that we will require a request in writing from anyone who wants a donation from the Town and they will have to provide a record of their expenses because it is public funds that are being used.

There was some discussion about making sure everyone is clocking out for lunch. Mrs. Daly stated that she does not sign off on her staff's time sheet, but if this is what the Board would like her to do, then she can start doing it. There was some discussion about morning and afternoon breaks and this is something we need to address when we update our personnel policy,

Mayor Pro tem Artis stated that there are two paid staff at the Fire Department. She said one person fills out a time card and the other will send in a one line email stating that he worked so many hours. She said there is no time clock at the Fire Department. There was some discussion and it was determined that both staff would need to write out what days and times they work and that we will not accept a one line email. Mrs. Nichols said that she would contact Fire Chief Brooks and let him know.

Mr. Howell stated that Fire Chief Brooks was unable to attend the meeting because he was in the middle of an audit. The Board looked over the Fire Department's budget and had some questions about selling one of the fire trucks for \$3,000 when it was budgeted for \$15,000, the decrease in salaries, the proceeds from the sale of one of the fire trucks, the information on selling the Crown Vic, the increase of property insurance, the capital outlay for equipment, and the decrease in uniforms. After much discussion it was determined that they will have to wait for Fire Chief Brooks to come in to get some of the questions answered, and Mrs. Nichols is going to get the information on the sale of the Crown Vic and where the proceeds went from the sale of the fire truck.

There was some discussion about the Fire Department selling government property without consulting with the Board for approval. It was determined that the Board will inform Fire Chief Brooks that he will need to let the Board know what he would like to sell, and they will be involved in the process of the bids and the sale of any property.

There was some discussion that packages are being delivered to a house across the street from the Fire Department. It was determined that this cannot happen, and if there will not be anyone at the Fire Department, the package needs to be delivered to Town Hall.

There was some discussion about the amount that the Town gives to the Fire Department is determined. Mrs. Nichols said that she put in the amount needed to balance the budget.

The next budget workshop date is April 6th at 2:30 p.m.

(3) Dates for State of the Town Address

It was determined that the State of the Town Address will be the last Tuesday in June, which will be June 27th at 6:00 p.m.

(4) Daffodil Drop – Alderman Ruffin

Alderman Ruffin stated that he would like the Board to think about having a Daffodil Drop and get a commitment at the next Board meeting. Mr. Howell made a suggestion that we have a Daffodil Sprout. There was some discussion about having music, hot chocolate, etc. Mrs. Daly suggested that they get a committee together to organize this event, because it will take some time to put it together.

Recess:

Mayor Pro tem Artis called for a recess until 5:30 p.m.

Call to Order:

Mayor Flowers called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Closed Session: Personnel – General Statute 143-318.11(6)

Mayor Flowers asked for a motion to go into Closed Session for personnel. Mayor Pro tem Artis made the motion. Alderwoman Jones seconded it. All were in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Open Session:

Mayor Flowers asked for a motion to adjourn. Alderman Spivey made the motion. Alderwoman Lewis seconded it. All were in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Encouraging Quote: “Once in a while you get shown the light in the strangest of places if you look at it right.” – Robert Hunter

The meeting ended at 8:00 p.m.

W. Darron Flowers, Mayor

Shannon L. Daly, Town Clerk