



**LUCAMA BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
REGULAR MEETING
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2024
LUCAMA TOWN HALL
BOARD ROOM**

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

Mayor, Matthew Creech, (hereinafter “Mayor Creech”) called to order the regular meeting of the Town of Lucama Board of Commissioners (hereinafter “Board”) at 6 pm on February 5, 2024.

2. Roll Call

Mayor Creech conducted roll call – by use of sign-in. The following were present:

Commissioner, Michael Best (hereinafter “Comm. Best”)
Commissioner, David Johnson (hereinafter “Comm. D. Johnson”)
Commissioner, Jeff Johnson (hereinafter “Comm. J. Johnson”)
Commissioner, Kim Joyner (hereinafter “Comm. Joyner”)
Commissioner, Jody Teague (hereinafter “Comm. Teague”)
Town Clerk, Dena Owens (hereinafter “Clerk Owens”)
Utility Billing Clerk, Ashleigh Hooks (hereinafter “Clerk Hooks”)
Town Attorney, Gabe DuSablón (hereinafter “Attorney DuSablón”)

3. Approval of Agenda

Mayor Creech made additions to the agenda to include information regarding a new four-way stop on Spring Street and website approval. These items would be inserted after the public comment section.

MOTION: Comm. Best made a motion to accept the amended agenda; seconded by Comm. Teague. Motion carried by unanimous vote.

4. Approval of Minutes of Last Meetings

Mayor Creech gave the Board an opportunity to review the proposed minutes from the January 4, 8, and 12, 2024, meeting and monthly financial report.

MOTION: Comm. J. Johnson made motion to approve the January 4, 8, and 12, 2024, meeting minutes and financial report; seconded by Comm. Best. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

5. Public Comments

Gladys Martinez of 106 Boulder Drive was at the meeting to express her disappointment in the previous month's meeting. She mentioned that she felt the mayor was not being treated fairly and that the meeting did not need to be conducted, arguing back and forth. She suggested that the mayor stand firm and not back down. She also gave her opinions on other subjects as it relates to the mayor pro tem and a board approved resolution regarding powers of the mayor and board, prayer at the beginning of meetings and the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

Venus Barnes of 102 Hackney Drive was at the meeting stating that she had been attacked on Facebook mentioning that she was bad-mouthing the Town. She said that she was not doing that but does have a problem with the high utility bills. She stated that she stands behind the mayor. It is her hopes that things will get better in the Town. She said that businesses that had been lost or potential businesses that had not come in are due to the Board not getting along.

6. New Items of Business

Mayor Creech presented a proposal for a study by the Wilson County DOT for new stop signs to be placed on Spring Street. He mentioned having several citizens coming to him with concerns about excessive speeds going outside of Town. He was told that by the time they reach West Blalock, they are going more than at least 50 to 60 miles per hour. It concerns him as a public safety issue, and he is afraid that someone will have a wreck. He has been studying the concern. He suggested rumble strips but does not believe it will do anything. Speed bumps are not an option due to being a hindrance for the fire department trucks. He would like to have DOT come out to do the study and eliminate the straight of way going out of Town. The four-way stops would be placed at Hill Street, Goldsboro Street, West Blalock and Spring Street. He would like to have the approval of the Board for the study for the safety of the public.

Comm. Teague mentioned that the stop sign at Blalock and Spring Street is not in the Town limits. Comm. Joyner asked as to who would do the study and what the cost would be. Mayor Creech mentioned that DOT would conduct the study and there would be no cost. He mentioned that there would be nearly six to eight weeks for the study to take place due to the back log and would take one to two weeks to conduct the study.

Comm. Teague asked if when the study was being done on Spring Street if one could also be conducted on West Blalock. She mentioned that the traffic is just as bad on Blalock and was in hopes that they would have some suggestions to make the concerns better. Mayor Creech said that he was not suggesting the study for West Blalock at this time because he had not been able to confer with Comm. Best and had not been able to come up with any solution. He is aware of the concern and will request that they study Blalock as well when they are studying Spring Street.

MOTION: Comm. D. Johnson made motion to approve having DOT conduct a study on Spring Street; seconded by Comm. Best. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Comm. Best requested that he be included in any emails regarding the study. Mayor Creech agreed.

Mayor Creech took the opportunity to share the Town's website that designer, Victoria Toth, has been working on. He mentioned that the only concern that he was aware of was the history tab portion of the site. Through use of the screen, he shared the different amenities. The site is not currently published. Commissioner Joyner mentioned that she had not had opportunity to review the site, and wasn't aware that the other Board members had, and felt that they could not make any decision about the site without having an opportunity to review. Mayor Creech mentioned that he would provide the Board with access to review the site. Comm. Best asked if the Town would have the ability to add events, etc. Mayor Creech did not know the answer but would ask to get the answer.

Mayor Creech asked for a motion to approve the website, barring changes be made. Comm. Joyner mentioned a concern about making a motion to approve without the opportunity to review the site personally.

There was commotion within the gallery by a gentleman offering advice on how to proceed. Mayor Creech mentioned that he appreciated the input, but such would not be tolerated.

Comm. Joyner requested time to review the site, possibly by the end of the week to approve or not approve. She asked if it could be done without having a meeting. Attorney DuSablón mentioned that it could not be done. He said that it is not something that necessarily needs a Board vote, unless there is a dispute about something that is on the website.

Again, there was commotion within the gallery by a gentleman and Mayor Creech stated that he would ask again, one last time, to refrain from interjecting and causing the commotion.

Commissioner Joyner asked for more time to review the site. Mayor Creech conferred and stated that he would provide the information for site review.

Comm. Teague asked if the site had to be voted on. Attorney DuSablou said that it did not have to be voted on, but if there is a disagreement as to what it is on it, then it would be better if it was voted upon. He also mentioned that it would not need to be waited on for an entire month. He stated that the Board could call a special meeting for purposes of the site.

After much discussion, the motion was made to table the website launch to give the Board opportunity to review the site.

MOTION: Comm. D. Johnson made motion to table the launch of the website to give the Board opportunity to review the site; seconded by Comm. Teague. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

7. Town Administrator's Report

Admin. Clark mentioned that since his arrival, he has developed some suggestions for change, observations, and general information updates. He feels that with his years of experience, the areas will help in the organization and will help the Town to move more smoothly.

- Suggestions for Organization and Structure Change

Admin. Clark asked that the Board recognize that the Town's charter states that the Town operates under a Mayor-Council form of government and not the Commissioner form. He mentioned that there was very little difference, but that the Commissioner form was viewed as antiquated. He suggested that the Board begin to recognize themselves as Councilmembers rather than Commissioners, and as the Town Council rather than the Board of Commissioners. This is consistent with the naming of the governing board as allowed in NCGS 160A-101. Admin. Clark feels that this can be accomplished by a simple motion stating that from this day forward, the Governing Board for the Town of Lucama shall be recognized as the Town Council, replacing the working "Board of Commissioners."

Admin. Clark stated that in NCGS 160A-155, Article 7, Part 3, states that for the Mayor-Council form of government, "the Council is to provide for the

administration of the unit of government. This section states that the Council shall appoint, suspend, and remove the heads of all departments and all other employees: provided the Council may delegate to any administrative official or department head the power to appoint, suspend, and remove assigned to his/her department. Admin Clark suggested that with the appointment of a new Town Administrator or Manager, this power be delegated to the position. He suggested so because of the old saying that no one can serve two masters. He mentioned that it is difficult to be responsible for the operation and not have the power mentioned. Doing so also presents a clear line of authority and direction for the employees. He stated that nothing is lost in doing so because the Administrator / Manager continues to work for the Board / Council as a group and the decisions made must be consistent with their direction and desires.

Admin. Clark continued by suggesting that committees of two members each of the Council be appointed to the following areas of the Town's operation to serve as a liaison to the remaining members of the Council on actions and activities assigned to the committee. The committees will be Public Works and Utilities, Public Safety, and Finance/Administration. Committees will meet with the Town Administrator / Manager and department leaders as needed to discuss the plans, purchases, concerns, needs and budgets of the respective areas assigned and develop a recommendation or report for the Council for information or action. He gave examples from the previous meeting regarding the Meals on Wheels need of the building being cleaned. At that meeting there was not a clear direction given, and this will help in those areas. Another example was the sidewalk construction and there needing to be a clear scope of services for the project. It needs to be clear what the objectives are and what is expected of a contractor. Based on Admin. Clark's personal experience, he feels that having committees will allow each member to be better informed and allow each to get better information in making decisions. He believes it will help the operations move more smoothly. It will be good for employees because they will know exactly who they work for. All communications would go through the Town Administrator / Manager. Mr. Clark mentioned that he wasn't sure what the Board would choose to call the new hire. He did mention that he had some preference, particularly in the sense of hiring and looking for applicants, the powers and duties – if someone was looking at the position and did not have powers and duties, they may not express any interest.

- Prior and Current Years Audits

Mr. Clark mentioned that he has been meeting with Mr. Overton, the Town's CPA, to discuss the current and future position as it relates to the Audit Reports due to the LGC. It is hoped that the audits will be completely caught up and current, including the FY23/24 audit by the normal deadline of October 31, 2024. The goal is to have all audit current by June 30, 2024, excluding the current fiscal year. Mr. Overton is currently working the last of the most difficult years, 2022, and feels comfortable that 2023 will move more quickly, which should get the Town in position to begin the June 2024 audit when the fiscal year ends.

- Financial Review

The Local Government Commission requires the Town to submit a revenue and expense report to them covering the period of July 1 through December 31 for their review as part of the conditions for being on the watch list. Mr. Clark reviewed the report and found the revenues for the most part being on target. He did find that some lines were out of balance, however tax collections, the two largest checks will be received mid-January and February. On the expenditure side, Mr. Clark mentioned that everything was coming in as expected except for one item. In his review, he determined that the sale of electricity had exceeded all expectations, and the cost of purchase power is lower than what was expected. Because of the difference, Mr. Clark recommended that the electric rate schedule be temporarily amended by reducing the charge for electricity from \$0.15 to \$0.01 per kilowatt hour for residential customers and for small and large commercial customers from \$0.17 and \$.1375 to \$0.01 per kilowatt hour. This change in the rate will only be for the billing cycle which will cover the period of January 15 through February 14. He mentioned that doing so would give the Town an opportunity to review our situation and will give the customers a break from the last cold weather that took place during that period. Mr. Clark made it very clear that changing the rate schedule would only be for one billing period. He stated it would give the Town 30 days to get started reviewing the whole operation to see what is going on.

- Town Administrator / Manager Qualifications

Mr. Clark mentioned that he was planning to invite Lou Bunch with the North Carolina League of Municipalities to meet with the Board to provide guidance in the process of hiring a new Town Administrator / Manager. Before inviting her, Mr. Clark wanted to plant some seeds in the Board so that they would have some thought as to what kind of person is most

desirable to fill the position. He mentioned experience, education, salary, and other things that are important to them. He plans to contact her this week to determine some dates that she will be available and will work to coordinate with the Board's schedule for a mutual date.

- FY 2024 / 2025 Budget Planning

Mr. Clark emphasized to the Board and talked about their leadership abilities, some of the things that are very important to demonstrate leadership to the community, would be on the budget preparation. This is an opportunity to express the Board's desires regarding what they would like to see for the Town in the next Fiscal Year and in the future. Sometimes these ideas are like Christmas lists and it has to be determined what can be afforded. It is their opportunity to express the desires for capital projects they feel are important or changes in the services that the Town offers. This is also a time that the Board will determine the tax rate and other fees and charges that will be used next year. He mentioned that the Board will make decisions on the employees, such as Cost of Living raises, how many employees are needed, what tools they need, training opportunities, equipment, etc.

Mr. Clark said that this is the Board's opportunity to demonstrate the leadership that the citizens expected of them when they elected them to their positions. He mentioned that the numbers could be put together, but it requires them giving some direction. He mentioned that the time is soon approaching. Most budget preparations begin in March, and it is not far away. He suggested that they start planning activities and planning what their thoughts are to best utilize their time. Mr. Clark mentioned that he understands that Mr. Overton will help Clerk Owens, interim Finance Officer, prepare the budget. He has encouraged her to be a vital part of the budget, because understanding the process and understanding what the numbers are is critical when the day-to-day operations are started and to be able to explain to others what the numbers mean.

Mr. Clark gave the opportunity for the Board to discuss some of the areas that he highlighted and looked for feedback.

- Changing the title of the governing Board to the Town Council – becoming Council members replacing the words the Board of Commissioners. Mr. Clark sees it as moving the Town up a step making a progressive change to keep up with modern times. He feels that it helps the Board become recognized by others as what they really are.

Mayor Creech asked Attorney DuSablou if making the change would require an ordinance amendment. Attorney DuSablou said that he feels that Mr. Clark is suggesting something different, not changing the form of government, although that is something that can be done. He mentioned that the Town's Charter currently indicates that the Town is governed by a Mayor/Council form of government, that this Board is called a Council, not a Board. Attorney DuSablou asked that he have some time to study and review the Charter before action is taken. He does not believe there will be any change regarding the Board's authorities, because the form of government is not being changed.

- Admin. Clark mentioned that the next item suggested would be the appointment of the new Town Administrator. It did not require action at the meeting, but would be the delegating of hiring, firing, and suspending of employees. Mr. Clark mentioned if action was to be taken, then it could be used as part of the advertising for the administrator position. Mr. Clark feels like delegating this ability will help in getting more applicants, more qualified applicants for the open position.

There was a question posed by a gentleman in the audience about who was predicted to be in the position. Admin. Clark answered that he doesn't predict anyone, it would be of the Board's choosing. He mentioned that he was serving as the interim but would never project who would be the next administrator.

- Admin. Clark mentioned that he hoped the Board would move forward on rather than being Commissioners of a single area, i.e. Water, Finance, etc., that the Board create committees of two members, keeping within the open meetings law from having a quorum and being appointed to serve over the public works, public safety, and finance/administration. Some of the committees he would like to see while he is serving as interim because of some actions that he could get started getting the Board up to speed and to help develop what the functions are and the involvement of the processes.

Comm. Joyner asked with the assignments currently how would what is being suggested work. Admin. Clark mentioned that with Comm. Joyner being over water / wastewater, she and another member could serve as water / wastewater, public works and electric. Doing so couples the knowledge to determine how to look at a subject more thoroughly and absorb more information. Water / wastewater is a complicated process, as is electric. He feels that having another member will help to move more effectively along with a manager or department head to present items more

thoroughly to the Board. This will work in other areas such as finance when sitting in the meeting for preparation of the budget.

A question was posed once again by a gentleman in the audience regarding the functions of the committees. Admin. Clark answered. The gentleman stated that Admin. Clark needed to be more specific and began interjecting himself into the meeting. Again, his question was answered by Admin. Clark. After continually interjecting himself into the meeting, Mayor Creech asked the audience member to refrain. The gentleman continued. Mayor Creech asked that the gentleman have a seat several times, at which time the gentleman stated that he would stand.

Admin. Clark told the Board that he would like to see the committees implemented immediately, so that they could begin working toward creating a system where everyone becomes much more informed. For example, the administrator and electric director could speak to the committee in a work type environment where a conversation could take place and the members could understand the terms and the real concerns of utilities.

Comm. Teague asked that when Admin. Clark mentioned the committee, is that considered the two people. He concurred. She asked when the committee had the findings, when would the findings be presented to the Board. Would it be in a meeting? His answer was absolutely, it would be in a formal report to the Board. Mr. Clark stated that in his career, he feels that in a small town, committees work the best.

Again, the gentleman in the audience made a commotion and Mayor Creech asked that he leave the meeting. He was escorted out by Deputy Martinez.

After more explanation, Comm. D. Johnson asked if Admin. Clark would be the one who appoints the committee members. Admin. Clark mentioned that the committee members would be appointed by the Mayor. He suggested that the Mayor begin coupling those who he thought should be on the respective committees.

MOTION: Comm. Teague made motion to form committees, seconded by Comm. D. Johnson.

Comm. Joyner mentioned that there were three committees and five Board members. Would someone have to serve on two committees? Admin. Clark concurred. Comm. Teague mentioned that Comm. Best was over parks and recreation. She asked where that area would be placed in the

committee delegation. Admin. Clark mentioned that the area would fall under finance and administration.

Mayor Creech asked whether the mayor would be a de facto member of each committee. Admin. Clark stated that the mayor would be an ex officio member of each committee but would not have a vote.

MOTION had been made a seconded, Mayor Creech asked for all in favor. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Comm. Joyner asked Admin. Clark for clarification on when the past due audits would be completed. He mentioned that it was in hopes that the past due audits would be completed by June 30th. She asked once all were completed, would the grant monies become available. He answered yes and mentioned that some of the grant monies are loans, which would require the audits to be current. Some loans depend upon the 22/23 audit.

- Admin. Clark suggested that the Board consider reducing the electric rate for the billing cycle of January 15 to February 14 from \$0.15 to \$0.01 for residential and from \$0.17 and \$0.1375 to \$0.01 for commercial customers. Doing so will give the customers some relief from the cold weather and will also give the Board a chance to figure out where the Town is, to see what adjustments need to be made. Again, Admin. Clark mentioned that he is requesting this again for one billing cycle. He mentioned that in the power business the next few months, become shoulder months, which means that the usage goes down, and will take the Board through the fiscal year before any rate adjustments. He mentioned that the next heavy month will be July.

John Joyner was given an opportunity to ask a question. He stated for clarification purposes, Mr. Clark was suggesting that the cost go from \$0.15 per kilowatt-hour to \$0.01 per kilowatt-hour for one month. He said that this would be a drastic reduction for one month. Mr. Clark concurred.

Gladys Martinez mentioned that she was concerned if the rate was adjusted for one month, that the next month she would receive a doubled utility bill. Clarification was made that she would only receive a bill for the usage for the following month.

Comm. Teague asked if there were any late charges applied to accounts currently or any balances left, they would remain on accounts. Admin. Clark concurred. This rate change does not affect water or sewer charges, electric only. Comm. Joyner asked if in the meantime a rate study could

take place. Admin. Clark mentioned that he would like to bring someone in immediately, because the sooner they come in the better the information would be coming in earlier.

Comm. D. Johnson asked if Admin. Clark had spoken with the Town's engineer, UTEC. Mr. Clark stated that he has not spoken with them, but he hasn't reviewed their budgets. He stated that each town had their own responsibility to set rates and he has no knowledge of what their budget looks like. Comm. D. Johnson mentioned that he noticed rates that were included in the report were from several different big towns. He wondered why Admin. Clark did not include the small towns like Black Creek and Lucama. Mr. Clark stated that when he worked in another small town recently, he had to get the same information and he had it stored on his computer and felt the information would be helpful for the Board to get a feeling of what other towns are charging. He stated that he would hope the Town would be somewhere in the same ranges. He wasn't saying that the Town could match Wilson, Greenville, or Rocky Mount, but he feels that looking at the power supply cost that the Town can still be regionally competitive.

Sandy Tyson, a resident, was late to the meeting due to having to work late. She asked if she could sign up to speak. She apologized for the interruption. Mayor Creech asked if she was present to make a statement or if she had a question. She answered that it was a little of both. She was present at the meeting because of her concern of loose chickens that live on her road, free range chickens. Mayor Creech mentioned that public comments had already taken place and he could not allow her to speak, however, he asked that she give her contact information to Admin. Clark for later contact.

Comm. Joyner asked Admin. Clark if he had someone that could do a study. She understands that the Town could get a study from UTEC. Comm. J. Johnson mentioned that there was a contract with UTEC. Comm. Joyner asked if there was a possibility of getting two studies so that there would be something to compare. Admin. Clark stated that there wasn't a need to get two studies. He stated if the Board was insistent of having UTEC do the study, it would be better if they could come in quickly to start looking. Comm. J. Johnson mentioned that he has spoken to them on January 30th and UTEC was interested in meeting with all towns and do a study on the electric system, power costs, etc. Admin. Clark asked if UTEC does only the power cost side or does he do the retail rates as well. Comm. J. Johnson said that rates, power cost, electric system and revenue requirements. Admin. Clark asked if UTEC could come quickly. Comm. J.

Johnson said that he would get in touch with them the next day. Clerk Owens asked to ascertain whether the company could do one town only. Comm. J. Johnson mentioned that he had stated to them that it would be better to do each town and then have a meeting together afterward. Mayor Creech requested contact information for UTEC.

Comm. Teague asked that if the study found that there needs to be a rate adjustment, if the change could take place at any time. Admin. Clark concurred. He stated to remember that the entire budget needed to be considered and if it took place during the middle of the year, that the entire budget would need to be adjusted, but doing so wasn't a problem. He feels that there is enough flexibility built in that it would not impact the regular operations.

Attorney DuSablón reminded the Board and Admin. Clark that the Town is under contract with UTEC. They are Town's facilitator for electric energy. He felt Admin. Clark is speaking from a budgetary stance and a quick-change adjustment versus what UTEC does where they look at the Town's overall cost of power and the other number of factors to figure out what the appropriate power rate is. He wanted to ensure that it was known that the Town is under contract with UTEC as a consultant.

Comm. J. Johnson asked if the Board agreed with the one-month reduction in rates if a letter could be presented or statement stating when the rates would go back into effect to \$0.15 and \$0.17. It was stated that information could be placed in the month's billing. It was suggested that all forms of media be used to get the information to the customers. Clerk Hooks mentioned that putting a leaflet in the bill would be an avenue to get the word out, but often the inserts are not read. It was stated that possibly placing stickers on the bill or envelope would be an idea. Mayor Creech suggested that placing an announcement on the Town's Facebook page would be an avenue as well. It was stated that if information regarding the rate change needed to be on the Town's Facebook page only.

MOTION: Comm. Joyner made a motion to reduce the per kilowatt hour rate for one month only from \$0.15 residential and \$0.17 and 0.1375 commercial to \$0.01;

Comm. D. Johnson mentioned that it is possible when the rate study is done that the rate could end up going up, rather than down. Comm. Joyner agreed and said that doing the study is a chance that is being taken for the rate possibly going up.

MOTION CONTINUED: Comm. D. Johnson seconded the motion. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Admin. Clark continued his report with items for future discussion. His intent was to give the Board ample time to consider the information shared.

- Electric Rate Review

Admin. Clark mentioned that it is critical that the rates be reviewed to reflect current costs. Included should be the cost of purchase power, capital or system improvements, supplies for daily operation, equipment replacement and personnel. He reminded the Board that they are in the electric business and are to provide a service to the customer base, trying to provide quality power at the most efficient cost, being sure the customers can afford what is being sold. He stated that they have a responsibility to invest in the system so that it produces the same results for years.

- Establishing a Capital Improvement Plan

This fund would be for the capital needs of the electric system. There has been some identification of pole replacement needs, conductor replacements, reclosures to make the system better. He will bring back to the Board a list of the capital improvements needed in creating the capital project fund.

- Reviewing the Kilowatt Hour Sales Versus the Purchased

This review will determine what the sales are versus that which is purchased. This number is critical in running an electrical system, knowing what the system losses or unaccounted for kilowatt hours. A typical range is five percent for a system the Town's size. Anything beyond that percentage is a concern and worth looking for.

- Utility Poles

It has been stated that the system has many wooden poles that are in a deteriorated condition. It does not appear that the Town is collecting anything from CATV or telephone companies that are attached to the Town's poles. These companies are using the poles and generating a profit without paying, riding along for free. There are also some area lights that are connected and not being charged for. All of these will be reviewed by having a company that specializes with pole inventory and conditions. They will do a system-wide review, looking at every pole, checking the birthdates

on the poles, conditions, checking what is attached to the pole. It is also critical that the spacing requirements are met, and Admin. Clark feels that some of the companies attached may be in violation. This puts everyone in jeopardy by allowing the companies to not meet requirements, the Town becomes liable if someone gets hurt. Once a study is complete, someone will negotiate with CATV and the telephone company for pole attachment agreements and get the proper billing for the area lights identified.

- Water and Wastewater System

Admin. Clark mentioned that both systems needed to be evaluated to determine the sales versus production in the water and in the billing of wastewater, as compared to the gallons treated. He believes a review of the equipment condition in both systems is needed to ensure peak performance.

Admin. Clark stated that it is important to create a connection to the Wilson County water system as an emergency backup for the Town's water source. He mentioned that a loss of power could cause the Town to be out of water for the duration of the power outage, which could be lengthy if a severe hurricane or other act of nature were to come through the area. He plans to meet with Ron Hunt, the Wilson County Manager, the following week. Comm. J. Johnson mentioned that there is a grant in the process to get water to the school for emergency connection.

- Water and Sewer Line Extensions

Admin. Clark stated that any extension to the system requires that an engineer prepare plans and specifications, which must be approved by NCDEQ prior to construction. Although it does not seem to have been the procedure in the past, it should always be in the future. Fines could be significant if a project is completed without approval.

- Training Certifications

Admin. Clark mentioned that an extensive effort should be made to have all personnel properly trained and certified in their respective jobs, these include special training, safety training, lineman training, etc. It is important to strongly encourage training. As an example, having someone up in a bucket that doesn't have proper training and gets hurt, with the Board knowing the person isn't qualified or properly trained. Admin. Clark also mentioned that having a single water and wastewater operator is risky,

being that there isn't a backup, plus the risk of wearing the single operator out.

- Employee Relations

Admin. Clark stated that is unclear when the employees have had a cost-of-living assessment increase, or a performance pay increase. These are critical in hiring or retaining quality employees and expecting them to perform at high levels. It does not appear that either have been considered lately and with inflation as it has been, the employees may be struggling or even considering somewhere else to work. He suggested that this be addressed soon, because the Town currently has a good nucleus of employees that care about their work and the Town, and their job.

Admin. Clark mentioned that there may be other areas to study, however he asked the Board to be aware that the items in discussion would need future consideration.

Comm. Teague stated that she was proud of the work that Admin. Clark had done in his ten days of working for the Town. He was thankful and stated that it is his responsibility to do the work and hopes that he has brought to the Board things to consider that will help to move forward.

8. **Departmental Reports**

Comm. J. Johnson reported that the electric department is currently waiting for switches for the new Dollar Tree. They have been trimming trees in the Saint Mary's Church Road area.

Comm. J. Johnson reported that the Fire Department had a total of 30 calls for the month of January. There were six calls in town and 24 in the county. There were 14 first responder calls, two fire alarms, three structure fires and assisted outside agencies on nine different calls.

Comm. Joyner reported that there were no issues in the water and sewer department at this time, and everything was working normal day-to-day operations.

Comm. Joyner mentioned that there was a recent Facebook post asking for activities that could be done as a community to bring everyone closer together. She specifically mentioned a suggestion regarding a food truck. She is interested in putting information out to see if there is any interest in having a food truck come to the Town once a week. They could set up in the Town's parking lot, which is

centrally located. She mentioned if there were enough trucks interested, that at some point it may be beneficial to charge them for setting up, which will give the Town more money to put towards the events that are planned. There was much discussion and was mentioned that Comm. Joyner would look further into the possibility of having the trucks come to Town.

Comm. Teague reported that the Sheriff's Department in the month of January responded to one call for service in traffic and transportation, two calls for service regarding alarms, there were five calls for animal enforcement, two calls for assisting motorists, one call for attempt to locate, one burglary vehicle in progress, two calls for careless and reckless, one disturbance call, and two disturbance of the peace calls, five calls for domestic in progress, there were 51 calls for escorts, one call regarding fraud, two welfare checks, one call to speak with an officer, 81 security checks, two suspicious person and three suspicious vehicle calls, one traffic stop, one call for unknown problem/man down, nine subpoena service and one warrant service call.

Comm. Teague mentioned that there had been some interest in placing a little library at the park. There have been offers to build the box. She mentioned that it caters to everyone, but more so for children. This project is a volunteer venture.

MOTION: Comm. D. Johnson made motion to allow the volunteer venture of the "Little Library" with placement at the park; seconded by Comm. Joyner. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Comm. Best for the street department, reminded of the mayor's request of the study on Spring Street and the four-way stop sign. He asked if there were any updates on bids for sidewalks and no other bids were received.

Comm. Best mentioned that with Spring being on the way, there will be more park usage. He mentioned that the first event planned will take place on Saturday, March 30th, being an Easter Egg event. There will be more details to come. He mentioned setting up meetings with Clerk Owens and others that are traditionally involved in community events.

From the audience, Mayor Creech allowed Gladys Martinez the opportunity to ask about sidewalks down Little Rock Church Road to Dollar General. Because it is a State Road, it was stated that she needed to contact DOT.

Comm. D. Johnson report for the library as having a door count of 194, reference questions 92, computer usage 28, 310 materials checked out and three new library cards issued. There were two programs planned, Walking in a Winter Wonderland Scratch Art Craft with 12 participants, there were two participants in the Community

Narcan Training and Overdose Awareness Program. He reported that the new library director was Karey Blanchard and she would begin her position on March 1st. He mentioned four events planned for the month of March. A new blind for the library door has been purchased and is on the door.

9. Closed Session

Comm. J. Johson requested that the Board go into closed session pursuant to NCGS §143-318.11 regarding personnel matters.

MOTION: Comm. J. Johnson made motion to move into closed session; seconded by Comm. Teague. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

10. Re-opening of Open Session

MOTION: Comm. Teague made motion to adjourn the closed session and move back to open session; seconded by Comm. Best. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Comm. J. Johnson mentioned that he had received information on a water and sewer Asset Inventory Assessment. He mentioned that the Board would need to make a resolution to accept the grants and that more information would be given at next month's meeting.

11. Adjournment

Mayor Creech adjourned the meeting at approximately 7:56 pm, February 5, 2024, upon motion of Board.

MOTION: Motion was made to adjourn by Comm. Teague; seconded by Comm. Joyner. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Respectfully Submitted: Dena Owens, Town Clerk