

TOWN OF PLYMOUTH MEETING MINUTES
January 31, 2024 – VIA COUNCIL CHAMBERS AND ZOOM
9:30 a.m.

I. CALL TO ORDER – Mayor Brian Roth

Mayor Roth called the meeting to order and welcomed all attendees.

PRESENT	ABSENT	COUNCILMEMBER
X		Mayor Roth
	X	Mayor Pro-Tempore Tharps
X		Councilwoman Byers
X		Councilwoman Davis
	X	Councilwoman Nixon
X		Councilman Teel
X		Councilman Wobbleton

Mayor Roth turned the floor over to Town Manager Floyd after explaining to Council that staff has asked Council to write down questions, let staff get through their presentations and then ask questions at the end of their presentations.

Town Manager Floyd reported that she has been working with staff and reviewing policies, plans, and procedures. The Department Heads will give briefings on projects that are happening in the Departments.

II. UPDATES/BRIEFINGS ON TOWN PROJECTS AND DEPARTMENT OPERATIONS

A. UTILITIES

Town Manager Floyd asked Nadine Moore to begin with a report on Utilities who then explained usage, readings, billing, fees, payment methods, frequently asked questions and forms that are on the website, outstanding bills, and collections. Town Manager Floyd explained the statute of limitations on collections and getting accounts written off in order to adjust accounts receivables so that the numbers are more in line for audits.

Councilwoman Teel asked about an account on Gavin Road and asked if it had been cleared up. Ms. Moore stated that she will speak with Councilwoman Teel about that account later. Mayor Roth asked trend wise, if the Town is getting caught up or is the Town behind with collecting past due accounts. Ms. Moore stated that if payment is not received in 90 days, she automatically closes their account. Town Manager Floyd explained that if

there is no activity in 90 days, the deposit is applied to the balance. She also reported that she stressed that the staff to stay in line with the policy, but there are times when payment plans are used to try to help people to get caught up. Councilwoman Teel asked about the payment plan. Ms. Moore reported that depending upon the amount of the bill the payment plan might be from three to six months. Councilwoman Teel asked if the current bill is paid along with what is due from the payment plan. Ms. Moore answered yes.

Mayor Roth asked that Debt-Set Off be explained so that everyone can understand what that means. Town Manager Floyd explained how Debt-Set Off works. Councilwoman Byers asked what the percentage of unpaid utilities is and suggested that 90 days is too long to wait. Councilwoman Davis stated that she understands the payment plan due to the high rates. Councilwoman Nixon stated that this is a budget item and should be discussed at that time.

NOTE: Councilwoman Mary Nixon arrived at 9:37 a.m.

B. TAX COLLECTION

Ms. Watisha Arnold explained the tax rate and interest; dates taxes are due and payable; dates liens are attached to parcels; dates delinquent taxes accrue interest at 2% as well as $\frac{3}{4}\%$ monthly thereafter; when report is made to the Council to declare taxes delinquent and decide when liens will be advertised in a general circulating newspaper and posted at Town Hall. Ms. Arnold also reported the uncollected balance for 2023 as well as the uncollected balance for 2013 – 2023. She then reported the collection remedies.

Mayor Roth spoke about the differences between bigger cities and small towns property valuations and walkaways as a major challenge and why the Town's 74% collection rate is lower than it should be. Town Manager Floyd added that liens and demolitions have been attached, which contributes to the rate. She further reported that Attorney Isenberg has been working with Mark Bardill from ZLS to review past accounts, a lot of which are heir accounts. Councilwoman Teel asked when the last time garnishments were enforced. Town Manager stated that it was around 2020. Another issue is we have to submit social security numbers in order to use Debt Set Off.

Councilwoman Byers asked if the Town has an agreement with Washington County for property not to be sold unless Town taxes have been paid. Mayor Roth replied that the State allows the county to not allow transfer of deeds if they owe back taxes; and, it needs to be looked into by Attorney Isenberg. Councilwoman Byers then asked about the uncollected balance 2013 – 2023 in that how many properties are involved as well as 2023. Finance Officer Wallace stated that a spreadsheet is being compiled that will have those answers.

C. CODE ENFORCEMENT AND PLANNING AND ZONING

Code Enforcement Officer Brown explained his duties as well as the Town's relationship with the Albemarle Commission, Board of Adjustments, and Planning Board. He then defined abandoned vehicles; different nuisances; the violation process; enforcement; abatement procedures; and, demolitions.

Councilwoman Nixon stated that she is hoping that the Town can get more volunteers to assist in cleaning up. She spoke about a call that she received a call from a person who directed a tourist not to stop in Plymouth. Councilwoman stated that we have to get the Town cleaned up. Town Manager Floyd explained that staff is working hard to get the Town cleaned up and spoke about the demolition budget. Councilwoman Davis asked if the tourist was told not to stop in Plymouth because of Code Enforcement issues or because there is nothing here. Councilwoman Nixon stated it was for both reasons. Town Manager Floyd stated that the Town is working with the State to get the highway cleaned up, as well as more lighting. Councilwoman Nixon stated that she would like to start an operation called "Clean Sweep." Code Enforcement Officer Brown explained that there is a Community Clean Up Day initiative being planned that involves citizens and staff that volunteer to clean up. It will take place in April.

NOTE: Councilman John Sharps, Sr., arrived at 10:14 a.m.

D. POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Williams reported on the staff that comprises the police department; hiring; training; and searching for good, qualified officers to fill the vacant positions. He then reported about the issue with streetlights; the streets that can use additional lighting; and, the process it now takes for Dominion Power to fix the lights. There was input by the Council regarding the lights and Mayor Roth asked staff to look into the suggestions. Town Manager Floyd stated that staff are looking into it. Councilwoman Byers suggested that contact information to report lights being out can be added to the utility bill. Chief Williams continued his report that included criminal activities; and, community events. He ended by speaking about bridging the gap between the police and the community in that they need to work together. Town Manager Floyd reported that she attended a meeting with the Police Department the evening before and they talked through addressing the challenges.

A motion was made to take a twelve minute break and reconvene at 11:00 a.m. by Councilwoman Byers with a second by Councilwoman Nixon. The motion passed unanimously.

E. FIRE DEPARTMENT

Town Manager Floyd reported on behalf of Chief Tim Miller. She reported on their mission; what they do; the insurance rating as a result of ISO inspections; an explanation of what ISO inspections are; community involvement; weaknesses; opportunities; threats; short term goals; and, long term goals. She then explained fire department funding. Mayor Roth explained that the Fire Commission is made up of Fire Chiefs in what is called the Conaby Creek area. Mayor Roth also stated that the Fire Department is actively recruiting volunteers. He also asked Town Manager Floyd to explain the benefits associated with being a volunteer firefighter. Councilwoman Byers asked about the aging equipment and Town Manager Floyd explained what the budget priorities are. Councilwoman Teel asked if the Town pays for the Fire Department. The answer was yes; however, the County contributes, as well as the Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) and some special grants. The Fire Department are also dispatched for accidents and an extensive discussion took accidents, flashing lights, crosswalks, and jaywalking.

Councilwoman Nixon stated that there were too many four way stop signs and spoke about the cost. Town Manager Floyd explained that the Police Department asked that the stop lights be replaced with signs due to the cost of the lights.

F. PUBLIC WORKS

Public Works Director Wright stated that he gives a briefing on all of the projects that the Town is working on every month; however, this will be a more in-depth report. He began by talking about the dock pump out station for the ferry system in order to get rid of the waste from the boats.

Public Works Director Wright then moved on to \$160,000.00 grant for the Asset Inventory Assessment to assess the Town's sewer line and lift stations. A new camera was purchased to look at the lines. We can expect a sewer rate study and an Asset Management Study. The grant is due to be closed out in July of this year once it is approved by the Department of Environmental Quality and presented to the Council. The report will also contain a rate study.

Public Works Director Wright then talked about a \$725,000.00 from the Department of Commerce for Streetscape and showed where the project will be located, what that project entailed, and the timeline. Town Manager Floyd explained that Requests for Proposals for construction and observation have

been released. The bid was awarded to the Wooten Company and will be brought to the Council at the February meeting for approval. She further explained that Allison Platt submitted the grant in the amount of \$865,000.00; however, Commerce only awarded \$725,000.00 with a cash match of \$52,000. It was Allison's hope to get other grants to expand the project. The total needed to complete the project will be \$87,000.00.

Public Works Director Wright then discussed the Wilson Street Ball Park. He explained that the Town allocated \$213,485 to upgrade the ballpark. Public Works Director showed a diagram of the plan and discussion took place about possible changes to the plan. Town Manager Floyd explained that the Town submitted a PART F Grant last year and did not receive an award. She stated that the Town intends to submit one this year as well. Councilwoman Teel suggested that the name be changed from Wilson Street Park. After a short discussion about changing the name, Town Manager Floyd stated that the plan can be brought back to the board in case there are any changes that need to be made. Mayor Roth asked how much the Town has in matching funds and it was determined that there is \$191,000.00 in ARP funding that will be used for the match.

Public Works Director Wright described a sketch for the Downtown Dog Park. The Council discussed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Downtown Development Association (DDA) and the Town. He explained that the location will need to be moved further down Water Street towards Martin Lane. Town Manager Floyd reported that staff and Attorney Isenberg are working to finalize the proposed MOU.

Public Works Director Wright stated that the Town Hall lobby needs to be renovated. With the addition of an NC License Plate Agency (LPA), changes will have to be made in the lobby so that it will be ADA compliant. He explained the proposed changes to the Council. Town Manager Floyd explained that the LPA will bring more revenue to the Town. She reported that the Department of Motor Vehicles already has completed a study for parking. Judith Schmidinger from DMV joined the conversation through ZOOM and updated the Council as to what is actually needed. Councilwoman Teel asked about the timeline. Town Manager Floyd stated that renovations should be completed in approximately six months and then the Agency can move their equipment in at that time. Ms. Schmidinger also questioned the timeline. Town Manager Floyd stated that she will get back to DMV with a timeline.

Public Works Director Wright reported on the Pines Elementary Lift Station. He met with the County, Wooten, and a representative from the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners to assess potential funding sources, as he suggests that the County needs to assume the cost as it seems that more than the school will end up using the lift station.

Public Works Director Wright then reported on the Viable Utility Grants for Water and Sewer. He discussed the scope and costs for the project and suggested four proposed project areas to be considered by the Council as the Town only received a portion of what was originally requested. Public Works Director explained that the Town must match funding. After a lengthy discussion of the proposed project areas, Town Manager Floyd asked that the Council review the areas and be prepared to make a decision at the next Council meeting.


Mayor Roth stated that there are several other projects that the Council needs to discuss as well as begin to talk things through on the upcoming budget process. Town Manager Floyd asked that if anyone had any questions, please call, or email the contact information included in the reports so that staff can have answers at the February Town Council meeting.

Councilwoman Nixon asked that she, Councilman Wobbleton and Councilwoman Davis meet with the gentlemen that participated in the fire rescue. Councilwoman Davis stated that she has spoken with them. Mayor Roth reported that staff are working on plaques as well.

III. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Councilman Wobbleton to adjourn with a second by Councilwoman Teel. The motion passed Unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,



Dorenda Wallace
Clerk

Brian A. Roth
Mayor