

TOWN OF COLUMBIA BOARD MINUTES FEBRUARY 5, ~~2014~~ 2024

The Board of Aldermen of the Town of Columbia met in regular session at 7:PM, Monday, February 5, 2024, in the Meeting Room of the Columbia Municipal Building. Aldermen attending were Sandra Owens, Lynda Mastronardo and Bryan Owens. Mayor James W. Cahoon presided.

Mayor Cahoon called the meeting to order, asked Alderman S. Owens to offer a prayer for the Board and welcomed those in attendance.

Upon motion of Alderman S. Owens, the Consent Agenda was unanimously approved. It included: Minutes of January 2, 2024 Regular Session Board of Aldermen Meeting.

Mayor Cahoon announced the Public Comment Period and invited comments and suggestions from those attending. Ms. Marian Fauth spoke in opposition to the Vape Shop recently opened at the intersection of US-64/Scuppernong Drive and L.A. Keiser Drive. She noted the shop was near the schools and said the town should not allow such establishments in the town. She said the shop's sales promote substance abuse and asked why the Board protects such businesses. She asked, "Why is Columbia doing nothing?"

Mayor Cahoon responded that the right to operate a legal business can not be denied if it meets the Town's Zoning and Business regulations. He said violations of the law and evidence of illegal activity should be reported to the Sheriff.

Sheriff Kevin Sawyer said the items being sold are all legal in North Carolina and can be purchased at any local convenience store or grocery supermarket. He said the schools have procedures for dealing with vaping.

With no additional comments, Mayor Cahoon closed the public session.

Sheriff Sawyer then gave the January Law Enforcement Report. He explained that the number of citations issued within the town is down significantly as deputies have been directed to focus on patrolling the troublesome places in town, or "on the bad things and not on traffic tickets."

He then addressed the weekend shooting that occurred on S. Road Street. He said the Sheriff's Office is working with the SBI on this case that occurred at the intersection of S. Road Street and Railroad Street. He then said the lack of mental health services is a major problem and that cameras are needed to help monitor trouble spots, asking the Board to support cameras at a cost of about \$5,000.00 annually. The possibility of securing a grant to provide cameras was discussed. Mayor Cahoon said the Town will look for grant funding.

Town Manager Rhett White reported on CDBG- NR progress. He said two homes are under construction, but the question of what unused funds can be used for has not been resolved. He said the State has said no to demolition of vacant structures and still wants a public space such as a garden or small park. He said houses on Fonsoe and Railroad streets may qualify for funding.

The Manager reported that the Free 'n Easy property is nearing transfer as soon as the funds that go with the house are made available to the Town. He asked the Board to thank Sen. Hannig for his work on this project if the opportunity presents itself.

Mr. White reported that the Legislative appropriation for a new pontoon boat to be used for River Roaming programs on the Scuppernong River has been approved. He noted that the town has paperwork to complete to secure the funds. He also noted that the Partnership for the Sounds is in negotiations with a boat dealer for a similar pontoon boat purchase for use in Windsor and will try to get a similar price and concessions for Columbia.

Discussion followed about how the boat will be used. It was noted that Partnership for the Sounds has operated the River Roaming programs for more than two decades and has the volunteer base to continue such educational programs. The consensus was to contract with Partnership for the Sounds to operate the boat with appropriate insurance, procedures and conditions with the Partnership paying the town \$1.00 per year.

Mr. White said he has been assured that the ZIP Line consultant is continuing to seek investors for that project.

Mayor Cahoon reported that the Harbor Town Ferries Celebration in Columbia will take place Wednesday, April 24th. This will introduce the ferries to the local community in a festive occasion.

A possible FEMA grant opportunity for the Tyrrell Volunteer Fire Department (TVFD) to secure a helipad to aid in the transfer of patients from ambulance to air ambulance was discussed. The Manager was directed to talk to the TVFD about applying for the grant.

Mayor Cahoon shared a letter that he sent to State Insurance Commissioner Mike Causey opposing the proposed 42% homeowner insurance premium increase.

The Board discussed the possible designation of a Social District. Alderman B. Owens advocated for a district and noted that Edenton, Elizabeth City and Manteo have established Social Districts and have not seen problems. He said such a designation would compliment the Harbor Town ferries and might aid in recruiting restaurants to the downtown area.

Mayor Cahoon said he does not support creating a Social District. It was noted that currently there are no restaurants in the downtown with on-site alcohol permits.

Alderman S. Owens asked that the proposal be discussed when the two absent Aldermen are present. Upon motion of Alderman S. Owens and unanimous vote the topic was tabled for later consideration.

Mary Ann Hassell, tax Collector, reported that collections stand at 78.70% of billings. She said another bill for taxes is being prepared and will be mailed to those who have not paid their 2023 taxes. She said this will be followed by publishing the list of delinquent taxpayers in the Coastland Times newspaper.

The budget vs. actual budget information was shared with the board. It was noted that both the General Fund and Water & Sewer budgets are in line with expectations.

Mr. White presented the Manager's Report. He commented on three grant opportunities including the FEMA grant for first responder equipment, a Lowes community improvement grant that may work with demolishing several old homes, and the NC Coastal Resources Commission grant for bulkheads and beach access programs.

He asked the Board to consider setting a fee for making copies for the public. Alderman Mastronardo noted that the Library charges a fee for copies. Upon motion of Alderman B. Owens and unanimous vote the fee for copies was set at 50 cents for black and white and \$1.00 for color copies. There will be no charge for tax or water/sewer receipts.

Mr. White reported that the Scuppernong Rier Festival is struggling financially. Mayor Cahoon suggested going to the two banks that were previously in town for donations. He said the banks may have left the community but they still have the accounts from Columbia and Tyrrell County.

Mr. White said the Planning Board will consider final approval of the Inner Banks RV Park at their February meeting.

He reported that the State has approved the engineering plans for the new water well and for other water system improvements. These ARP funded projects will be completed by 2026.

The sewer system will get similar upgrades.

There was no report from Town Attorney Will Crowe.

At the request of Mayor Cahoon and motion by Alderman S. Owens with unanimous vote, two future meeting dates were changed. The July meeting will be on the 2nd Monday, July 8th. The August meeting will be on the 2nd Monday, August 12th.

Mayor Cahoon suggested the town should develop a Capital Improvement Building Plan.

Alderman Mastronardo reported on activities at the Library and suggested the Town follow up on the Lowes Grant. She also reported that there are "Porch Pirates" in Columbia.

Alderman B. Owens encouraged exploring funds for the boardwalk and nature trail and also the Lowes grant.

Mayor Cahoon announced the Economic Development Committee meeting scheduled for 6:PM, February 15th. He appointed Alderman B. Owens to sit in for Alderman Hal Fleming who is absent due to illness. He also announced that Monday, February 19th is President's Day so offices will be closed for the holiday.

With no other business and motion to adjourn by Alderman Mastronardo, unanimously carried, Mayor Cahoon adjourned the meeting.

This the 5th day of February, 2024.

James W. Cahoon, Mayor

Attest:

Rhett B. White, Clerk