

**TOWN OF RONDA SPECIAL BOARD MEETING**  
October 21, 2025, 5:00 PM

The Ronda Town Board met on Tuesday, October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025, at approximately 5:00 PM with the following members present: Commissioner Helen Porter, Commissioner Chris Nelson, Commissioner Kevin Reece, Commissioner Bobby Munsey, Commissioner Rheajean Benge, Town Consultant Michael Boaz, Town Clerk Rachel DeGroat, ORC Jeff Jones, Maintenance Staff Jordan Church, and Town Attorney Mr. Jonathan Sink attending via phone.

Members of the public were present, those that signed in are Michael Combs, Matt York, Laura Bottoms, Victor Varela, Doug & Mary Jane Combs, Tim & Wanda Blackburn, Maria Soots, and Ryan Soots.

Mayor Pro-Tem Benge called the Meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

Commissioner Nelson led the Pledge of Allegiance and gave the invocation.

**AGENDA:** Mayor Benge asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Commission Reece requested an amendment to the agenda. Commissioner Reece specifically requested to add to *Board Action 20. Appointment of the following*, to include subset *d. Wilkes Tourism Board (TDA)*. Commissioner Nelson made the motion, Commissioner Munsey seconded. Mayor Benge asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Nelson made the motion, Commissioner Munsey seconded.

**MINUTES:** Mayor Pro-Tem Benge proposed to push the review and acceptance of previous Minutes to the November Work Session allowing Board further time to review. Commissioner Nelson made the motion, Commissioner Porter seconded. Unanimous vote recorded to move the acceptance of previous minutes to the November Work Session.

**EXPENDITURES:** Mayor Pro-Tem Benge proposes pushing forward the review of expenditures to November Work Session. Commissioner Nelson agrees that with new members recently appointed to the Board allow more time for review. Commissioner Nelson makes the motion to move the approval/review of expenditures to November Work Session. Mr. Michael Boaz says that for clarity's sake expenditures posted in the meeting packet have already been paid. Mr. Boaz states that he is more than willing to discuss, review and answer any questions tonight or in the future but again, they have already been paid. Mayor Pro-Tem Benge states "we are going to go onto reports."

## Reports:

**1) ORC/Maintenance** – Jordan Church reports: new tap install on Elkin Highway 268, water leak repair complete on Austin Traphill Road, new black chain-link fence installed at Ronda Memorial Park. Change of speed limit signs from 25 MPH to 15 MPH on Old Traphill Road, installed No Littering signs on Factory Street and department performed litter pick-up along Factory Street. Checked water meters, fixed several small leaks with the majority being at the meter, Calvary Small Gospel Church was one of those repairs. Performed end of line flushing this month, mowing performed at Town Hall, tire popped on transport trailer so A1 was asked to perform a one-time mow at the Water Tower, tire on trailer has now been replaced and back in service. Pressure-washed and stained large town trailer, and pressure-washed half Town Hall but condition of the siding on Town Hall has made the task difficult. Fall Clean-Up began this week and should be completed by tomorrow.

Jeff Jones reports: engineers in town on Monday to observe the Pressure Reduce Valves (PRVs) being replaced, engineers can then start “understanding what we currently have in our system so that we will have the same consistency for future PRV replacements.” The new well site preliminary sample came back “a little elevated.” Engineers are in conversation with “their people in Raleigh to create a game-plan so that we remain in compliance with that.” Commissioner Nelson asks “elevated in what manner? What is elevated?” Jeff Jones states that he does not have the exact numbers with him but from what he understands, the “alpha gross uranium is a little elevated verse where they normally like to see it on a fresh well. But again, it’s a fresh well too and when you are first breaking rock you are gonna have a higher concentration.” Jeff Jones continued that this is preliminary and they are waiting for their environmental people to report back, possibly flushing the system and re-testing the well, or seeing if the level is acceptable with where we are at with the normal mixing between our current chemistry with our other well and our new well. That same test was just recently performed with our current well and they have that information to compare with the findings in the new well. They are also talking about aeration and adding that to the new well to maintain compliance. Commissioner Nelson asks, “how do you flush the system?” Jeff Jones replies, “they will just re-install the pump and pump it again.” They are waiting on their environmental guys for further guidance and perimeters. Commissioner Nelson asks, “how elevated?” Jeff Jones reassures the board that “it is still in compliance, but it is on the upper end of where that compliance is.”

Jeff Jones proceeded reporting his conversation with the engineering firm regarding the status of the proposed project on 268. The engineering firm confirmed that they are getting close to submitting that project to the state for

approval. This project would be providing water services from the high school into town. They are still in discussions with the water meter project and the well project and if there will be money left over to apply to this project along 268. Jeff Jones also reports on the completion of the PRVs today. The new fittings and piping have been replaced with all "stainless," a good upgrade for the town. Pressures were all validated after installation was completed. Recommendations have been made that the town continue to monitor the pressure for the next week or so, possible adjustments might be needed, and maintenance department will watch closely over the next few weeks. The engineering firm will be here Monday to re-flow some of the hydrants from the original hydraulic model with the new valves now to see what differences these have made and if any adjustments need to be made on that end. Commissioner Nelson asked about the standpipe, "if anything else needed to be done at the standpipe or has that been completed?" Jeff Jones replied that the recent fix made about a month ago has resulted in no further issues at this time and there is a re-build kit onsite ready to go. Jeff Jones is holding off on scheduling the re-build kit installation for about a week or so while we watch the new PRVs, see how they function, perform the flow testing needed on them, and confirm that they do not overstrain the system before we make the call to install the re-build kit. Commissioner Nelson stated that was his concern and how much this will affect the functioning of the standpipe. Jeff Jones stated, "right now, we are in great shape." Jeff Jones reported that these new pieces of installed equipment are rather significant but need to "break in." However, there have been no calls since the installation of residents' pipes blowing up and that is a good sign that the system is managing the upgrade. Commissioner Munsey asked if there are any sensors that can be placed on the valves to report or detect a leak early enough. Jeff Jones reported that there are companies where you can purchase equipment for that but there is so much that needs to be done first. Jeff Jones agreed with Commissioner Munsey that equipment would be useful but a bit premature to do now with other needs that should take priority first. Fine tuning the system first needs to be the priority.

- 2) 2024 Audit Findings** – Michael Boaz reports that he was limitedly involved in this 2024 audit and in attendance only at the first meeting. Subsequent meetings were then overseen by "Rheajean and the clerks at the time." However, Mr. Boaz has what they said at the close-out performed on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024. The state auditor looked at 6 different potential issues, six claims and basically all those allegations, all those claims were dismissed as unfounded. They could not find any documentation or proof, or any indication that any of these things that they looked at had happened. That close out meeting "lasted 9 minutes". The state auditor did not produce a written report because there were no findings, "they do not produce written reports when they dismiss the allegations."

Commissioner Reece asked Mr. Boaz if these allegations were anonymous complaints? Mr. Boaz confirmed that the state auditor received an anonymous report that there were issues. Commissioner Reece asked if those allegations were related to claims that maybe a clerk had misused town funds? Mr. Boaz replies "yes." Commissioner Reece asked if that was found to be unfounded. Mr. Boaz replies "yes." Commissioner Reece asks if those allegations were that some elected officials had misused town funds? Mr. Boaz replies "yes." Commissioner Reece asks was that found to be unfounded. Mr. Boaz replies "yes." Commissioner Reece asks were there any findings in this report that "an elected official has gotten kick back money for the water funds to purchase a new vehicle?" Mr. Boaz replies that was not one of the allegations that they investigated. Commissioner Reece asks Mr. Boaz "do you have any reason as the financial officer that that has happened?" Mr. Boaz corrects Commissioner Reece stating "I am not the financial officer. That is a very specific statutory term, and I want to be clear I am an advisor, a consultant to be sure." Commissioner Munsey states "That's Helen, she is the Financial Officer." Commissioner Reece continues that he wants to "verify to the public that people had not taken water money, that the town clerk had not used town funds to purchase personal items. But it is important to the town that the citizens know that there was an audit, it was complete and that the state auditor did not find any wrongdoing. Last question I have is there any reason to believe that anyone got a kickback doing a driveway at North Park that they could use to purchase a boat?" Mr. Boaz replies, "I have no reason to believe that anybody has ever gotten any kickbacks or anything like that. And if I did, I would report that to DA and the Board." Commissioner Reece asks, "Helen have you saw anything, detected that anybody has gotten any kick back money?" Commissioner Porter replies, "No I have not."

**3) Current Standing of Town Grants:** Mr. Boaz reports there are currently three water-related grants that the town has. One is a regular competitive grant, an Asset Inventory Assessment (AIA) Grant from that state for \$150,000.00. Purpose of that grant is to look at the water system, study assets, figure out what you have and develop a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) on how you should repair and replace parts of that system going forward. And then a financial plan on how you can do that. Wooten is the engineering company for this, and it is almost complete. They are finishing the water model and once they are done with the water model, we will have the CIP and all that to follow. The second grant was direct appropriation, non-competitive. In the state budget the legislators have appropriated money to various municipalities, counties, and organizations. This is a direct appropriation of state money, sitting in the state's bank account in Raleigh. We do not have access to that money until we go through a process. Wooten is also the engineer on that. We have used some of the \$3.5 million, that is where the test well is being paid for, where the

engineering for the test well, some of meter project and some of the water line projects, which is how that is being paid. The deadline for that one grant is December 31, 2026. And that deadline is hard because it is federal, by ARPA funds passed by COVID relief. The money must be spent; check must have been written to the end vendor for that money by 12/31/2026. The third grant started at \$1.5 and is now \$1.8 million, that is also a direct appropriation, in the state budget and is ours. There is no deadline for that, and we have not spent any of it. So, it is still sitting there in its entirety. How do we get that money? We will hire an engineer to do the preliminary work for us. While doing the engineering they prepare an invoice for the engineering services based on those hours. They submit to the town, town reviews and they prepare a request form that is sent to the state. State looks at the request; make sure it matches what the budget is. Each one of these projects has a Capital Project Ordinance that was approved by the board. The town will make sure they all match and then they release the money to the town. And then we pay the contractors. We do not pay the contractor, engineer, whoever until we get the money from the state. And we do not get the money from the state until those invoices have been reviewed by town staff, the engineers, and state officials. Each one of those projects has a state case manager that reviews those projects and says yes you can release that money. Based on how that all works and the time it takes and knowing that the state does not issue or pay anybody any money from December 15<sup>th</sup> to the first of the year and June 15<sup>th</sup> till July the 1<sup>st</sup> because they are closing out the calendar year and fiscal year, you are not getting a check from the state for those 2-week periods. That means we must make sure that our requests for that \$3.5 million that it is in process and approved and money issued to us before 12/15/2026. That gives us about a year from today (10/21/2025). So, the water line and the meters and the well, there is 12-month timeline from today. Jeff reported that they are about to submit the plans for the water line. So that will go to Raleigh for review, 4-6 weeks. Then it will go out for bid. The construction basically must be completed by Halloween 2026. Any time after that I am going to be really concerned that you are not going to get the money back in time to meet that 12/31 deadline. So again, the town does not have \$5 million dollars in its bank account. All that money is in Raleigh, in the state's bank account, and we get it as we go through these processes. Commissioner Nelson "just so everybody is clear no money comes into the town's hands. Once it has been approved by the state, they send the money to our account, and we write a check straight to the contractors and no money has literally touched our hands. Other than writing the check?" Mr. Boaz "it enters our bank account and then we have a certain, like 3-7 days. We issue the check the next time we do AP. It sits in our bank for a week at most." CN states "I know there has been some talk by some people that somehow or another we have supposedly received this money

and spent this money. And nothing can be further from the truth. So, thank you for making that clear." Mr. Boaz "we cannot get it. It has to be approved at all these levels." Commissioner Munsey "also because these are grants will there be oversight over these funds and making sure that they are spent.... will there be estimates given? And then the work done and we submit that to the grant holder and they pay it directly? What oversight are we going to have of who does the work, when the funds are paid?" Mr. Boaz replies "the boards oversight is one, at the beginning of the process the board selected Wooten as its engineer, you have power over the engineer you selected. As the project moves forward the engineers will take bids, we had one bid with Yadkin Well and the board awarded Yadkin Well. They did the work. We have not paid them yet because they have not submitted the paperwork properly but that is a different story. Once they do that and it goes through the engineers review process, and they make sure they are billing for what they said they were going to bill for, which they did, they submit all that to the state, the state releases the money and then we cut a check through Accounts Payable. The board's oversight is in picking the contractor. The engineer has a construction observer onsite while work is being performed to make sure the records match. It gets approved and we get the money from the state. The board does not have direct oversight over every check that goes out but the engineer the board selected is reviewing those to make sure that what you are being billed for is what was actually installed and then the state is reviewing that as well."

- 4) **YVSA:** Victor Varella reports a pump station in Elkin failed and will need to be replaced. The replacement will cost about \$50k. They are in the pursuit of various grants and the YVSA is currently in decent shape financially.
- 5) **HCC:** Commissioner Booby Munsey reports no meeting was held last month. Previous months' meeting discussed the New River Water Shed Protection and the New River Water Trail Expansion adding 61 additional miles. Also grant information regarding Helene, The NC Recovery Funding Opportunities, offering \$240 million statewide, that may benefit the town. The information will be turned over to Mr. Boaz to review and see what applications the town can pursue and benefit from.
- 6) **Wilkes EDC:** nothing to report with no representative appointed to attend.
- 7) **Wilkes Chamber:** nothing to report with no representative appointed to attend.
- 8) **Yadkin Valley Chamber (YVC):** Commissioner Chris Nelson has nothing to report. Commissioner Reece proposed, with Commissioner Nelson's approval, to appoint Victor Varella as the new Ronda representative to the YVC. Commissioner Nelson agreed, explaining that due to his hectic full-time work schedule he has limited availability to give the position the attention it deserves and is disappointed in himself for that. Commissioner Reece made the motion to

appoint Victor Varela as the Ronda representative on the Yadkin Valley Chamber. Commissioner Bobby Munsey seconded the motion. Unanimous vote in favor of Victor Varela appointed as the new Ronda representative for the YVC.

**OPEN FORUM:** Resident Michael Combs requesting the board to consider lowering the speed limit along what is Elkin HWY 268 to 35MPH for the section that is entirely within the city-limit portion of that street. Mr. Combs states that those pulling out of Chatham St, Cemetery St, Hickerson St, and Dollar General, this is a safety concern for those entering on to 268. Many cars traveling on 268 as they enter city-limits are traveling at greater speeds from the 45MPH marking and do not slow down to the required 35MPH posted speed. Mr. Combs requests that the board consider extending the 35MPH signage at the beginning markers of City-Limit signs for the safety of the citizens of Ronda and the people traveling on HWY 268.

Resident Doug Combs speaking on behalf of his wife Mary Jane is requesting permission from the board to volunteer their time to put some plants in the stone planter that is around the flag pole at Town Hall and also to volunteer their time at the cemetery to trim some of the overgrown bushes. Mr. Combs also requests permission from the board that if he is allowed to perform some trimming maintenance at the cemetery that he can then contact Jordan to come pick up and dispose of the brush. Mr. Combs reassures the board that if granted permission he and his wife will perform all the work and only ask for the town to remove the brush. Mr. Combs also states that regarding all the questions running through the town, if allowed by the law, can copies of the expenditures, print out information regarding these grants, where Ronda money is at, what accounts it is in and how much it is, can copies be offered to the public at board meetings. Sharing this information will show the public what the town is really doing, what they are accomplishing and where the money is going. Commissioner Benge states "we can do that, can't we Michael?" Commissioner Nelson states, "I'm not sure we can do the accounts cause it's not our accounts." Mr. Boaz states "we cannot do the grant accounts, but we can certainly.... there is something we can do. I don't want to rush into saying something without having thought it through like Doug said. I think we can make something happen that accomplishes the goal. I don't know if it is paper copies, the budget vs actual report is sixteen pages long. I don't want to make twenty-five copies of a 16-page report but maybe I can post it online. There maybe is something I can do. I will figure out between now and next month what that solution is." Mr. Boaz referred to the request of Mr. Michael Combs regarding the speed limit change request. Mr. Boaz states that request will have to be approved by the DOT and we can draft a letter to the Division Engineer requesting that they study that and lower

that speed limit. Or probably even better than that is we will prepare a resolution for your approval at the next board meeting. "Resolutions are better than letters."

Mr. Doug Combs asks for clarification if Mary Jane has permission to place plants at the flagpole at Town Hall. Commissioner Nelson suggests waiting on any planting at Town Hall because the board is in the process of reviewing quotes for the repair work needed at the stone planter at the flagpole. Commissioner Munsey states that he has also had recent discussions with Commissioner Benge regarding the use of already approved town funds to enhance the landscaping around Town Hall and maybe include Mary Jane's offer to volunteer and help with some of that planting and ideas too.

Commissioner Reece referring to the public access to town expenditures and accounts, "if the board would agree that every board meeting future, the list of accounts of what we had total, general funds, investments, I don't think that's but a couple pages. I think I would like to see that made available as a copy that anyone comes into the sign-in sheet can look at." Mr. Boaz replies "yes, not a problem. If it is one copy not a big deal." Commissioner Reece states "if we can make it available that any citizen that reached out to the clerk, we can make it available. We just need to get that out to the public as easily as possible. They need to know that they can come in and get that." Mr. Boaz states "Yes, any document we have is public record." Commissioner Reece states "and board are we going to go ahead and tell Doug and Mary Jane that we appreciate the volunteer work, and they are welcome to go and do whatever at the cemetery and to call Jordan and ask him to come pick whatever up. Are we ok with that? Thank you for doing that."

Commissioner Nelson asks "is this stuff not already readily available on the town website? Are we not updating the town minutes?" Mr. Boaz replies "No. So the minutes would not have all this information in them. Having a paper copy here for people to see, that's fine. Emailing it, that's perfectly fine. We can do that. Between now and November we will have a plan in addition to having paper copies. We will figure something out."

## **BOARD ACTION:**

- 1. Travel Policy/Reimbursement Requirements:** Commissioner Porters agrees to allow Mr. Boaz to take the lead on this board action. Mr. Boaz states that he had forgotten that the Town Travel Policy covers elected officials and upon review he is suggesting a few changes be made to the current policy. A draft has been provided to the board that notes those suggested changes. First suggested

change is the requirement that the full board approves any travel outside of Wilkes, Surry or Watauga County, recommendation is to change that to reading: *full board approval is required for travel outside the state of North Carolina*. And there is a second provision here that meal reimbursements will only be made for overnight travel. Mr. Boaz recommends that while you should not be reimbursed for three full meals, a change should be made to read *during daily travel you will be reimbursed for one meal*. Commissioner Munsey suggests that a dollar amount is set needing board approval, "let's say anything over \$100 needs the board's approval. When you are spending the taxpayer's money and you are spending anything over say \$100, I think you should get approval."

Commissioner Reece states ".....if you limit the board members hands for being able to go to the meetings where they potentially can get stuff to help the town, to me that is tying the citizens arms behind their back. Because it is watched, two people have to sign a check in Ronda. There are two check signers of every check that goes out, and they look at what that check is for." Commissioner Reece states he would move to accept these changes. Commissioner Munsey states "give us time to read it, study it, and put it on the agenda for next session." Commissioner Reece states that the motion is already out there. Commissioner Nelson seconds that motion. Commissioner Munsey states "I prefer to wait." Mayor Pro-Tem Benge calls for a vote. Let the record show the new travel policy has been amended.

2. **Financial Officer Duties/Responsibilities:** Commissioner Munsey states that he, Commissioner Porter the Financial Officer, and Town Clerk had a meeting with Mr. Greene. Town Clerk Rachel DeGroat begins by sharing that the key points of this meeting were specific to the town entering into the Unit Assistance List (UAL) last year. Mr. Boaz explains that UAL is a list that is maintained by the Treasures Office of Municipalities and is a list that the office has concerns based on financial performance indicators, timing of the audits, fund balance levels, and savings account in your major funds. Ronda has been on the UAL since it was created. Mr. Boaz continues that one reason for being behind on our audits, about 3 years at one point, the firm hired by the town at that time had dissolved and the town had to hire a different firm and get caught up on those past audits. The town accounting firm is working on the audit for the fiscal year that just closed. Town Clerk states the cause of last year's entry on to the UAL was the \$160k deficit specific to the water fund. The meeting was to share various support services and resources with the town to continue to progress and move forward in a better financial standing. Mr. Tim Greene stated in the meeting that their recommendation is not to have an elected official as the Financial Officer. Mr. Boaz clarifies that the LGC runs a year behind, so they are looking at fiscal

year 2024. Fiscal Year 2025 just closed out, and the town water fund did not do great in FY25. We just began FY26 and currently the town is doing much better with the rate increases that the board approved in FY26. When the expenditure report was run today, the town was about \$19k revenues/over expenditures in the water fund. Now there are some upcoming expenses that we know are going to happen but 1/4 into the year and we are in the positive territory and that is particularly good. The town auditor is Bernard Robinson Company (BRC). Mr. Boaz states that the town may want to consider in the next year putting out an RFP for a new auditor, that it is customary practice to do every 5-7 years to prevent complacency. Mr. Boaz states it is going to be difficult for Ronda to get off the UAL because within the water fund it will be difficult for the town to meet the performance indicators that Treasures Office has established because it will require you to set rates at a place that is not politically viable, especially in a town with only 400 customers. Commissioner Munsey states that neither himself as the Budget Officer nor Commissioner Porter as the Financial Officer were given bound copies of the 2024 audit, and that Mr. Greene stated in the meeting there was not enough oversight. With Commissioner Porter being the Financial Officer, she is to have access, not just paper documents but also electronic, everything at her disposal. The statute states that as the Financial Officer Commissioner Porter will be held financially responsible if there are any mistakes made. There is a training class in December that Mr. Greene recommends that both Commissioner Porter and the Town Clerk attend. Commissioner Munsey reads "the statute states that public record shall mean all documents, magnetic or other tapes, electronic data, processing records regardless of physical form. The definition includes files stored and hard drives, servers and other electronic devices used for public business." Commissioner Munsey asks Mr. Boaz about a hard drive not being accessible on the Town Clerks computer and the "five accounts" that Commissioner Porter does not have knowledge of. Mr. Boaz states "I do not know what accounts you are talking about but every month in your packet there is a spreadsheet that has each of the bank accounts including the Capital Management Trust Fund accounts and their balances." Commissioner Munsey states that Commissioner Porter needs to have access to the hard drives as outlined in the statute. Mr. Boaz asks Commissioner Porter, "do you want to have access to the hard drives?" Commissioner Munsey states "that is what Mr. Greene recommends." Commissioner Porter states, "I don't know how to work a computer." Mr. Boaz announces that all those records are available at Town Hall and can be provided to anyone upon request. A copy of the hard drive does not have to be provided though. Mr. Boaz states that he believes Commissioner Munsey "misunderstood what Mr. Green was speaking of regarding the statute

and access specifically to hard drives and that no town will ever release the physical hard drive of all financial documentation to anyone to take home upon their request." Commissioner Munsey suggests that maybe a meeting needs to be called with Mr. Green, Mr. Boaz, Commissioner Porter, the Town Clerk, and himself in attendance so that Mr. Green can explain to Mr. Boaz directly what he means when speaking of additional oversight. Mr. Boaz assures Commissioner Munsey that the Town Clerk has the same access to accounts, information, and hard drives that he does. Commissioner Nelson interjects that at "every meeting we get a copy of all financial information. If we get all the information that is on the hard drive at every meeting, and you can walk into the office and request, then what is the issue"? Commissioner Reece takes the floor and asks Commissioner Porter if you have "ever been denied access to the hard drives or any information you have ever asked for regarding finances in Ronda"? Commissioner Porter replies she has "never asked for the hard drives." Commissioner Reece asks, "but have you ever been denied and told you cannot have anything you have ever asked for"? Commissioner Porter answers "no." Commissioner Nelson states that "Mr. Green is used to dealing with systems and municipalities that are much different and much larger than the town of Ronda. And that we have our own set of rules that don't ask for Mr. Green's permission." Commissioner Munsey states "you still have to follow the statutes though."

3. **Plan of Action to Prevent Town Returning to the Unit Assistance List (UAL):** Commissioner Munsey states that oversight is needed. Having the Budget Officer and Financial Officer fully aware, involved and allowance of access and everything being transparent, and Mr. Green believes it is not happening.
4. **Water Meter Project Update:** Jeff Jones: First bid process was unable to move forward because one vendor used the incorrect form, another vendor did have their bonds correctly, another vendor had their submission perfect but was extremely expensive. These three bids submitted averaged a cost between \$180k and \$330k. For these reasons it was decided by the town to re-bid the water meter project. An adder was included in the new submission, a "fixed net" network to be included in the new bid. Fixed net means the installation of pods that are established around town that can collect the data from each meter and report that data directly back to the clerk at Town Hall. Only one vendor submitted that bid, the same vendor replied to the first bid at around \$330k. With the adder on the second, this vendor submitted a bid at just around \$500k. The town has around \$500k in the budget for water meters within this project and that is what has caused the recent delay in moving forward. The engineering firm went back to that vendor asking why such a significant increase in price.

The vendor replied that the extra cost was specific to the request fixed net option. The vendor stated that they would honor the original price without the adder, so cost will be around \$330k. Commissioner Nelson asks if this adder gives the town the ability to turn residents water off with the push of a button. Jeff Jones further explains that fixed net does not require any individual to go out and physically check each water meter, it will automatically read the meters, reporting it daily. It does not have the capability to shut off anyone's water. Commissioner Nelson states he wants the most modern system right up to the point of remote disconnect capabilities. Jeff Jones states we do not have that technology currently in either bid. The only difference between the pricing and bids right now is the first bid process was a system that requires an antenna and laptop on the truck or the second bid that was for a system that remotely gathers the information and reports it directly back to town hall. Regular drive-by system will take about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of day to gather all meter readings. That system on an annual basis will cost about \$1k-3k a year. Fix net requires nodes placed through the area with an annual fee of \$7k-10k. Training on the system is included in the pricing. Commissioner Nelson voices a concern that with the fixed net system reporting directly to the office then maintenance would not be needed to have a presence driving through town making sure the water system is working properly. Michael Boaz states "that is flawed logic." Commissioner Nelson asks if the drive by meters will send a signal if there is a leak. Jeff Jones says only when the meters are being read. Michael Boaz states do you want the fixed base or drive by, that is the question. Michael Boaz says the "benefit to fixed based is the technology is going to eventually bring everyone there. Having the state provided funds that the town is currently working with, the town risks not having those funds available down the road to decide to upgrade to fixed base then when the town can do it now." Commissioner Nelson states that there is a continuing cost for fixed net that the town will now incur. Michael Boaz says we can get the infrastructure with "free money" now. Benefits include that the fixed net is real time data, right now. Drive by still requires you to visit the meter to investigate. Commissioner Nelson asks "what are the advantages and disadvantages of the two vendors" proposed to offer drive by system versus a fixed net system. Jeff Jones says, "9 days", the drive by bid expires in 9 days before the rebid process must start all over again. If the board votes to move forward with the drive-by bid tonight, Jeff Jones says "installation will be completed in the next 4 months". Drive-by estimate for install, turn-key is \$300k-350k. Awarding the fixed base contract would be a 6-7-month timeline before installation is complete. Michael Boaz states that either way by May 2026 meters are in the ground. Commissioner Nelson asks, "what is the benefit of starting all

over"? Michael Boaz answers that the benefit is "you are going to the pinnacle of today's technology, within budget, under the guidance of a company who specializes in meters only, this is all they do. They know how to do the data integration, and that the meter software talks properly to the town's current billing software." Commissioner Reece says that it sounds like the delay is costing the tax payers of the town. Pricing has more than doubled in the past 2 years. Commissioner Porter motioned, Commissioner Munsey seconded the motion, 5/0 vote to accept first bid in the process, drive-by meters are the chosen upgrade for the towns water meter project.

5. **Old Traphill Road:** Michael Boaz reports that a quote was received to pave Old Traphill Road for \$113k but did not address the storm water issues on the street. Single quote in your packet from Vestal for about \$55k to address the drainage only. The other is a proposal from Wooten to come in and do an engineering study of the street from a drainage and resurfacing standpoint, help guide us through that process. If you approve the Vestal estimate, you are making progress on the ground, but you have only about \$130k in Powell Bill, if you spend \$55k on drainage only you do not have enough to come back and do the full re-paving. Wooten's quote a lump sum of \$6,500.00 for the engineering study. Globally you need to hire an engineering firm to study the town, to study the stormwater issues, the paving, and develop a plan to deal with paving and stormwater for all the streets. And then go and try and find money to do that. The town gets about \$20k a year in Powell Bill money and the paving of one road is much more than that. Fix the drainage issues now and then the asphalt but it will be a couple of years before you have the money to afford paving needs. Commissioner Munsey says that the quote from Vestal does "include equipment and measures with the installation of concrete pipes to divert and redirect some of the water issues on Old Traphill Road. Until the drainage issue is resolved, paving will do no good, you will still have structural issues from water. We can go ahead with and address these issues with town money by showing the community we are making progress." Michal Boaz states that the length of the engineering study will depend on what firm you hire and what term you put on their contract. Commissioner Nelson suggests that an engineering firm comes in to perform a town study and gives a plan of attack. Michael Boaz states that we might be able to "get some money to help pay for a full stormwater study, Golden Leaf Money to do some implementation of said stormwater plan and then some USDA grant loan to do paving on Old Traphill Road, Factory Street, the entire town". Start to finish does take time. Mr. Combs

from the audience suggests closing traffic on Old Traphill Road, speedbumps in the past have not helped, signage in the past has not helped. Commissioner Reece recommends having a Public Hearing regarding the closing of one end of Old Traphill Road and get the public's input. Also, Commissioner Reece says that a lot of these drainage issues began happening after the Sewer Authority (YVSA) performed work in the town. Commissioner Reece suggests with the board's approval allowing Victor Varella to engage with the Sewer Authority and requests a meeting between them and Mr. Combs on-site to show the issues that are plaguing Old Traphill Road after YVSA installed their sewer lines. Commissioner Reece continues by saying that "we need at the very least to have an engineer tell us what we need, to give us certified cause to attempt to request additional resources from the state." Commissioner Reece asks if we approve this \$6500 Wooten contract they will "give us a certified price of what it is going to take to fix the roads"? Michael Boaz says "yes, they will give you an engineer estimate." Commissioner Reece asks can "we approve that and put a condition on it that will be completed in six months"? Commissioner Reece motions to approve the Wooten contract for \$6500 specific to Old Traphill Road, on condition that it will be completed in six months, if they refuse that timeline it will be immediately brought back to board. Commissioner Nelson seconds the motion. 5/0 vote to award Wooten the contract to perform an engineering study on the city-limit roadways.

6. **Factory St:** Commissioner Reece recently met with the state budget director and learned about some money for smaller projects that is not as hard to get as larger appropriations. He met with a senator who connected him with a DOT engineer who is supposed to meet with me to look at the issues on Factory Street and HWY 268 and see if we can get contingency funds to flow from the state directly to DOT and have DOT fix the issue. The interest from the state is heavily due to the large business on the end of Factory Street that operates 24 hours a day with heavy traffic from large semi-trucks and Commissioner Reece is hopeful he can get the state to pay the repairs and it not come out of the towns general fund.
7. **Ronda Cemetery:** Commissioner Benge states that the plots on the map that are fully covered in RED mean that those plots have been purchased and somebody is buried there, if it was only half colored in RED that means the plot has been paid for but not yet occupied, if a plot was marked with just a name on that map it means that the plot was purchased but unknown if anyone was buried there yet. We will need someone to go out there with a probe and check

unknown plots. Commissioner Benge suggests maybe a "committee with volunteers from the public" to assess these unknown plots. Everyone in this town has family buried at the cemetery and we need to make the cemetery look prettier. Commissioner Reece requests a Public Hearing to get feedback from the public regarding the cemetery. Commissioner Reece says he believes the cemetery should have its own fund and not be coming out of the town general fund. Commissioner Reece suggests a cemetery committee and would like to see the pastors and deacons of all the local churches attend. Public Hearing will be scheduled for the not-so-distant future.

8. **In-town Property Tax:** Commissioner Benge advises that the in-town property tax is something the board cannot address or adjust until the fiscal year is over.
9. **Emergency Boat Ramp Yadkin River Access:** Commissioner Reece is requesting the approval from the board for him to re-visit with Fire Department, Rescue Services and Wilkes County Government to see if they still want the emergency boat ramp, are they still willing to partner with the town and what are they willing to do to help the town make it possible to install an additional boat ramp for the use of emergency services only. Commissioner Reece is granted permission from the board to go speak with the three parties to re-visit their past interest in an emergency boat ramp.
10. **Future Events:** Veterans Day on 11/11/2025 at 1PM at Town Hall. On the first or second Friday in December town will hold the Christmas Craft Bazaar. Saturday evening in December the town will be holding the Christmas Tree Lighting.
11. **Town Hall Camera Upgrade:** Town Clerk presents one quote for the board to vote on the needed upgrade of the current security camera system located at Town Hall. Commissioner Munsey makes the motion to accept the submitted quote from Frist Defense, Commissioner Reece seconds that motion. 5/0 vote. Quote for upgrade approved.
12. **Town Hall Stone Planter:** Town Clerk presents two quotes received, one from TCI Construction and one from Dowell Custom Construction to perform the repair work on the stone planter outside of Town Hall. Commissioner Nelson says that he is getting a 3<sup>rd</sup> formal quote, unofficial price he received was \$2k+ "for the

whole thing". Commissioner Benge states this action will be placed on the November Work Session to allow more time to research options.

13. **Town Hall Basement Door:** Town Clerk presents two quotes received, one from TCI and one from Dowell Custom to perform the replacement of the current exterior basement door at Town Hall. Work will include a fire-rated steel door, properly framed, and the pouring of a concrete slab. Commissioner Reece motioned for the lower cost bid with Dowell since this cost is coming from the town's general fund money. Commissioner Nelson does not like the payment terms of Dowell requiring a 75% cost paid up front and 25% after completion of the job. Michael Boaz states to tell Dowell the contract will be approved at 50/50 and if he will not accept those terms then we will re-evaluate. Commissioner Reece motions to accept with 50/50 payment terms, Commissioner Nelson seconds that motion. 5/0 vote. Dowell Custom Construction quote accepted with 50/50 payment terms.
14. **FEMA Maintenance Building:** Rachel DeGroat, Town Clerk explains that the FEMA grant money given specifically to the damage of Town Hall and the Maintenance Building caused by Hurricane Helene, the town has made the necessary repairs to Town Hall but those repairs have already exceeded the grant offering given by FEMA. While making the repairs to Town Hall, additional structural damage was found that was not seen by FEMA during their original walk thru and therefore was not budgeted in their grant allowance. The Town Clerk is currently working with the state representative to put together the necessary documentation to present to FEMA to request additional grant money to cover the extra money the town paid for the additional repairs in Town Hall and additional money to still proceed with making the necessary repairs to the Maintenance Building. The original grant from FEMA was \$41,905.40 for both Town Hall and the Maintenance Building. The repairs needed at Town Hall totaled \$51,300.00. The needs and repair work for the Maintenance Building have been placed on hold as we go through the process with the state to request additional grant money from FEMA. However, Town Clerk presents the board with a quote from Carolina Waterproofing & Home Solutions for \$4,000.00 to make needed repairs to the floor in the foyer and activity center in Town Hall. When the structural damage was found, needing to jack-up the exterior wall and replace the load-bearing support beam, there is now residual damage to slopes and weak-spots in the floor. Requesting the board to review and approve the quote provided to address these repairs immediately at the cost of the town.

Commissioner Reece made the motion to accept the quote. Commissioner Nelson seconded that motion. 5/0 vote to accept quote from Carolina Waterproofing.

## **15. Park FEMA Projects**

- a. **Playground Mulch:** Rachel DeGroat presents two quotes to the board to be paid for with FEMA money to replace the mulch located at the playground at River Park. One quote is from Rubber Mulch Warehouse, their material is made from used rubber tires, second quote is from Jelly Bean Rubber Mulch, their materials are made from recycled flooring tiles. Town Clerk presents to the board that there are health and safety concerns with rubber tires turned into playground mulch and suggest the board move forward with Jelly Bean. Commissioner Reece made the motion to accept the quote from Jelly Bean Mulch, Commissioner Munsey seconded that motion. 5/0 vote.
- b. **Walking Track:** Rachel DeGroat presents the board with two quotes, R&H Landscaping and Grading and Jeffrey Johnson, for the widening and replacement of gravel dust of the walking track located at River Park. Commissioner Reece motioned to award R&H Landscaping and Grading. Commissioner Nelson seconded the motion. 5/0 vote.

**16. ROW Contract:** Commissioner Reece asks the board to agree to move this action to the November Work Session to allow the board more time to review. Board agrees and this action will be moved to November Work Session.

**17. Town Hall Landscaping:** Commissioner Munsey requesting to stay within the allotted monthly budget, he will donate his time, material (at wholesale), and oversight to enhance the exterior landscaping of Town Hall. Mr. Boaz specifies that there is a building and ground maintenance line, exact allotted amount is unknown but can be confirmed. Mayor will provide oversight on the spending. Board has no issue and volunteers from the public are encouraged to participate.

**18. Change to Meeting Schedule:** Commissioner Benge shares that due to upcoming medical appointments until the end of January she is requesting that the Work Sessions currently held on the Thursday before each Board Meeting be moved to the Friday before each Board Meeting. Commissioner Benge also asks on behalf of the board to move the regular Tuesday Board Meeting start time

from 6PM to 5PM. Commissioner Reece makes a motion to accept, Commissioner Munsey seconds that motion. 5/0 vote. Scheduled with be changed through January, Work Sessions will now be held on the Friday before the Tuesday Board Meeting at 5Pm and Tuesday Board Meetings will begin at 5PM.

19. **Boaz Contract:** Commissioner Munsey would like the board to agree to give Michael Boaz a Christmas bonus. Commissioner Reece makes a motion for the town to give Michael Boaz an \$800 Christmas bonus, Commissioner Nelson seconds. 5/0 vote.

20. **Appointments to the following:**

- a. **Wilkes EDC representative:** Commissioner Nelson makes a motion to appoint Commissioner Reece as Wilkes EDC representative, Commissioner Porter seconds. 5/0 vote. Commissioner Kevin Reece is the Wilkes EDC representative for the town of Ronda.
- b. **Wilkes Chamber representative:** Commissioner Nelson makes a motion to appoint Commissioner Reece, Commissioner Munsey seconds that motion. 5/0 vote. Commissioner Kevin Reece is the Wilkes Chamber representative for the town of Ronda.
- c. **TDA representative:** Commissioner Reece introduces former Wilkes County Commissioner Keith Elmore; he has chaired a tourism board before and is willing to represent Ronda on the TDA. He will be able to meet with the town once a quarter and give an update. Commissioner Nelson makes a motion to appoint Keith Elmore, Commissioner Munsey seconds that motion. 5/0 vote. Keith Elmore is the TDA representative for the town of Ronda.
- d. **Mayor:** Commissioner Nelson motions to appoint Commissioner Rheajean Benge as Mayor. Commissioner Munsey seconds that motion. 5/0 vote. Rheajean Benge is appointed as the Mayor for the town of Ronda. Mayor Benge asks Town Clerk to include in November's Work Session agenda the time for the board to hear from the Ronda residents that are interested in filling the open Commissioner seat.

Mayor Benge calls for a 10-minute recess before entering Closed Session.

Commissioner Reece makes a motion to enter Close Session, Commissioner Nelson seconds that motion. 5/0. Board enters Closed Session.

Rachel DeGroat

Rachel DeGroat, Town Clerk