Board of Commissioners Work Session

Meeting Minutes

April 10, 2026, 6:00 PM - 8:25 PM

123 Chatham Street, Ronda, NC 28670, US

Present: Mayor Masterson, Commissioner Kevin Reece, Commissioner Bobby Munsey, Commissioner Chris Nelson, Commissioner Matthew Foster, Commissioner Helen Porter, Town Clerk Rachel DeGroat, ORC Jeff Jones, and Financial Consultant Michael Boaz.

1. <u>Mayor Report:</u>

Mayor Masterson opened the session by reporting on two ongoing issues: the Factory Street drainage problem and the matter of trash and junkyards within town limits.

Regarding Factory Street, the Mayor reported that the town's maintenance team had attempted to locate a buried culvert but could not find it after digging approximately three and a half feet. A prior dye test had revealed that water entered on one side of the road but emerged on the opposite side, suggesting significant subsurface water movement and a possible deteriorated or blocked culvert. The Mayor reported that he had met with the manager of the neighboring industrial facility, who granted permission for the town to run a drainage line straight across the parking lot and into an existing retention pond rather than following the road. The facility manager indicated the pond had sufficient overflow capacity and expressed a preference for the new routing. The Mayor noted he had asked whether the neighboring property owner might contribute financially to the project, given that truck traffic from the facility appeared to have damaged and blocked the original culvert. The manager indicated he would discuss this with the property owners.

Commissioner Reece noted he had been in contact with State Representative Sarah Stevens and her staff regarding securing state discretionary funds for the project, estimated at approximately $350,000 to address the full scope of potential road and subsurface issues. Commissioner Reece cautioned the board against committing town funds before a state funding determination, particularly given uncertainty about what might be found underneath the roadway. Commissioner Munsey noted there had previously been a discussion about hiring an engineering firm to conduct a study of all town roads and asked about the status of that effort. Financial Consultant Boaz clarified that the engineering firm had been retained and given six months to complete the study, which should be nearly finished. Once complete, the town could approach USDA for road funding.

The Mayor also noted that a prior dye test had produced near-immediate results, consistent with an unobstructed subsurface path, and suggested the board consider returning with the excavator to the location where the dye emerged to investigate further. No formal action was taken on Factory Street.

On the subject of trash and junkyards, the Mayor briefly introduced the topic, noting it had been brought to his attention. Commissioner Munsey indicated he had raised this issue before and reiterated the need for the board to address it. This discussion continued under Agenda Item 7.

2. <u>Water Line Extension Bids:</u>

ORC Jeff Jones presented the results of the competitive bid process for the water line extension project. Six bids were received. The engineering firm Wooten had estimated the project at $1,200,000; the bids came in favorably below that estimate.

The bids received were as follows:

- Baker Underground, Inc. — $983,665
- PDC — $1,086,688
- North State — $1,150,000 (approx.)
- Meta — $1,300,000 (approx.)
- Loc-Lane — $1,400,000 (approx.)

Wooten's recommendation was the lowest bidder, Baker Underground, Inc. ORC Jones noted that Baker Underground appears to be the commercial construction company's new underground utility division, based out of Yadkinville, North Carolina. He acknowledged that questions were raised about their municipal work experience, but emphasized that the project would be governed by a detailed specification book, that Wooten would have a construction administrator on-site, and that he personally intended to be on-site daily to inspect materials and workmanship. ORC Jones also noted that the favorable bid pricing effectively offset concerns about contingency funds that had been discussed in prior months.

An additional line item of $12,300 was noted to cover the securing of construction and permanent easements associated with the project.

Commissioner Reece acknowledged that Loc-Lane, a company with which ORC Jeff Jones has an established working relationship, was among the bidders but was significantly higher and therefore could not be recommended.

Commissioner Reece made a motion to accept the bid of Baker Underground, Incorporated in the amount of $983,665 for the waterline extension on Elkin Highway. Commissioner Munsey noted the importance of disclosing the vote to the public at Tuesday's regular meeting.

> Motion by Commissioner Reece to accept the bid of Baker Underground, Incorporated for $983,665 for the waterline extension on Elkin Highway. Seconded by Commissioner Nelson. The motion carried unanimously.

ORC Jones confirmed that contractual paperwork had already been prepared and the contractor would be notified following the vote.

Lead Line Replacement Program — Award Update

ORC Jeff Jones also reported that the town had received official award notification for a loan grant covering lead service line replacements along the Austin-Trap Hill Road corridor between U.S. Highway 268 and Pleasant Hill Road. The award is for $575,958 and is 100% forgivable, structured as a loan with full forgiveness. The sole financial obligation to the town is a 2% administration fee of $11,513.16, which is not forgivable. ORC Jones confirmed this interpretation had been verified in writing by a DEQ infrastructure funding representative named Jake Baldwin.

Commissioner Munsey noted that the town had spent approximately $15,000 on repairs in that corridor in recent months, and that this award would fund a comprehensive replacement of the problematic service lines in that section.

> Motion by Commissioner Reece to accept the lead line replacement program award. Seconded by Commissioner Nelson. The motion carried.

3. <u>Lead Line Replacement Program Results:</u>

Addressed in conjunction with Agenda Item 2 above.

4. <u>2025 Audit Draft Findings & Contract:</u>

Town Clerk Rachel presented the 2025 audit draft findings, which comprised the bulk of the meeting packet — approximately 60 pages. The auditors are scheduled to appear at Tuesday's regular meeting to present findings, answer questions, and obtain board approval of the audit.

Financial Consultant Michael Boaz noted that the audit contract must be formally approved by the board before the financial statements can be submitted to the Local Government Commission. He advised that the board may not have an official record of previously approving the current contract, and therefore approval should be placed on the Tuesday meeting agenda.

No vote was taken at this meeting.

5. <u>Budget Officer / Finance Officer Discussion:</u>

Commissioner Munsey raised a statutory concern, presenting documentation to the Mayor indicating that, under North Carolina General Statutes, a consultant or contractor may not serve as the town's budget officer. Commissioner Munsey noted that Financial Consultant Boaz had been serving in that capacity and argued this arrangement was not in compliance with state law.

Financial Consultant Boaz acknowledged that an argument could be made on either side of the question, and indicated he had no objection to being removed as budget officer, as his contract already required him to prepare the annual budget regardless of his title. He suggested that the Clerk could be designated budget officer with him assisting in that function.

Commissioner Nelson expressed that he was unaware of any formal denial of access to financial systems, but acknowledged that the current arrangement may warrant clarification. He stated that whoever holds the title should have real, demonstrated access to the financial data — including the FMS software (Southern Software), which is accessible from computers within the town hall building connected to its fixed IP address. Financial Consultant Boaz confirmed that he does not have access to trust accounts or payroll; only Town Clerk Rachel has transfer authority for those accounts through Fidelity.

The Mayor expressed a desire to bring the matter to a close, and encouraged the board to act. Commissioner Munsey also noted that Finance Officer Helen Porter, who had been serving in that role, should work collaboratively with Town Clerk Rachel going forward, as statutory requirements include demonstrated ability to access and review financial records.

Following discussion, Commissioner Munsey moved to appoint Town Clerk Rachel as budget officer, with Town Attorney Boaz continuing to assist in preparing the budget as required by his contract, and with the expectation that she have full access to all financial information in the process.

> Motion by Commissioner Munsey to appoint Town Clerk Rachel as the town's budget officer. Seconded by Commissioner Reece. The motion carried.

Town Clerk Rachel accepted the appointment while expressing some apprehension about the interpersonal dynamics that had surrounded the issue.

6. Michael Boaz Contract:

Following the action on Agenda Item 5, Commissioner Munsey raised a question about whether Financial Consultant Boaz's existing contract required amendment to reflect the removal of the budget officer designation. Town Clerk Rachel noted that the contract copy included in the packet may not have been the most current version, and indicated she would locate the most recent executed contract and determine whether a revision to the language was necessary. No formal action was taken.

7. Town Junkyards & Trash Removal:

Commissioner Munsey raised ongoing concerns from residents regarding junkyards and accumulation of debris at several properties within town limits, including two vacant mobile homes near Old Trap Hill Road and a property on Waddell Street. He noted that these conditions generate complaints from neighbors and create maintenance difficulties for town staff — in particular, that a water meter on Cemetery Street is inaccessible due to debris accumulation, which will present a problem when the town's water meter replacement project commences.

Town Clerk Rachel noted that the junkyard ordinance referenced in prior discussions had been found not to have been formally adopted and was therefore unenforceable.

Commissioner Nelson expressed a firm position against using ordinances to compel property owners to alter their private property, citing the foundational importance of property rights. He indicated he would not support any enforcement effort directed at private property.

Commissioner Foster proposed an alternative community-oriented approach — a "clean up Ronda" initiative — through which neighbors, churches, and community volunteers could offer assistance to property owners who may be struggling financially, physically, or otherwise. The board expressed general interest in this concept as a positive community-building effort.

No ordinance or enforcement action was proposed or voted upon.

8. Factory Street (possible sinkhole):

Addressed under Agenda Item 1 — Mayor Report.

9. Town Hall Flower Bed Electrical Work and Insurance Claim:

Commissioner Reece reported that the town hall flower bed previously had electrical outlets and a flagpole light, which were disrupted during recent landscaping work. The town's insurance policy covers restoration to the prior condition, subject to a $1,000 deductible. An electrician had been scheduled to assess the work but did not appear. Town Clerk Rachel noted that a licensed electrician familiar with underground wiring would be needed, as the town's regular maintenance contact is not qualified for that scope of work. The board discussed potential contractors, including Trent Parker Electric. Financial Consultant Boaz agreed to coordinate submission of the insurance claim once a contractor is engaged. No formal vote was taken.

10. Town Hall SOW Clarification (Main Entrance and Structural Repairs):

Commissioner Foster reported on a meeting held earlier in the week with Carolina Waterproofing to clarify the scope of work and associated costs for town hall repairs. He acknowledged an oversight on his part: he had understood the $36,400 quote to cover both the exterior wall structural repairs and the foyer floor, but it was clarified that the $36,400 pertains exclusively to the exterior wall, while a separate bid of $14,514 had been discussed in prior meetings (before Commissioner Foster and the Mayor Masterson joined the board) to address the foyer subfloor, ledger board, and joists.

Commissioner Foster explained the structural condition: a section of ledger board beneath the foyer floor had been removed at some point, leaving floor joists unsupported and causing the floor to flex noticeably. The old-style diagonal subfloor boards make a flat repair difficult without a full tear-out and replacement. Bringing both scopes together would total $50,914.

The board discussed the building's overall deferred maintenance needs. Financial Consultant Boaz encouraged the board to take a comprehensive view of the building's needs before committing funds piecemeal, noting visible issues including siding, interior lighting, and continued water intrusion. However, multiple commissioners acknowledged that the exterior wall — where the primary beam was found to be significantly deteriorated — could not be deferred further.

Commissioner Foster noted that the contractor, Carolina Waterproofing, had been asked to hold a schedule slot beginning approximately May 25th through June 20th for the exterior wall work, and that the foyer work could be completed in approximately one week while leaving the main meeting room accessible. During the exterior wall work, the building would not be available for public rentals or events.

The board also emphasized that any contractor must provide a current certificate of insurance prior to commencement of work, and that this requirement should be applied to all future contractor engagements.

Commissioner Reece moved to approve the $36,400 exterior wall repair with Carolina Waterproofing, contingent on the contractor providing a current certificate of insurance prior to the start of work.

> Motion by Commissioner Reece to approve the exterior wall structural repair by Carolina Waterproofing in the amount of $36,400, contingent upon receipt of a current certificate of insurance prior to work commencing. Seconded by Commissioner Nelson. The motion carried.

Discussion of the foyer subfloor repair was deferred pending a broader conversation with Financial Consultant Boaz about available funds at Tuesday's regular meeting.

11. <u>Update on Bids for Town Hall:</u>

Town Clerk Rachel reported ongoing difficulty obtaining comprehensive bids for the full scope of town hall repairs. Several contractors had visited but failed to follow up with proposals. A new contractor visited on Monday without a tape measure and indicated he would return Wednesday; no follow-up had been received as of the meeting date. Commissioner Reece asked a Ronda citizen in the audience, Doug Combs to assist in identifying qualified contractors to provide quotes. Mr. Combs agreed to provide the clerk with names and contact numbers of contractors in the area. The board acknowledged that a complete picture of the building's needs is needed before a full restoration plan can be financed, including potential grant funding through Commissioner Reece’s contacts.

12. <u>Grant Process with WTA:</u>

Commissioner Reece reported that Keith Elmore of the Wilkes Telecommunications Authority (WTA) had made the board aware of an active grant opportunity to obtain a tractor and a side-by-side utility vehicle for town use. Commissioner Reece confirmed he had shared Mr. Elmore's contact information with Financial Consultant Boaz and Town Clerk Rachel and requested they reach out to ensure the grant application is submitted before the deadline.

Mayor Masterson noted the town's current excavator, while valuable, is not well-suited for certain maintenance tasks better handled by a compact tractor or side-by-side. The board discussed the possibility of applying for both pieces of equipment.

Financial Consultant Boaz was asked to contact Mr. Elmore and confirm the application parameters and deadline.

13. <u>Tammy Mosteller:</u>

Commissioner Nelson reported that he had been contacted by Tammy Mosteller, a benefits specialist based in Charlotte with a local presence in Ronda, whose work focuses on life, health, and Medicare-related services. Commissioner Nelson proposed inviting Ms. Mosteller to Tuesday's regular meeting to give a brief presentation to the public, noting the town's aging population and the potential value of connecting residents with available benefits resources. Commissioner Nelson also suggested this could serve as a model for periodic community business spotlights at future meetings. The board was generally supportive, and Commissioner Nelson confirmed that he would advise Tammy Mosteller to sign-up for Open Forum at the upcoming board meeting.

14. <u>Administrative/Clerk Report:</u>

Town Clerk Rachel presented the following updates:

Minutes: The March meeting minutes are included in the board's packet for review and approval at Tuesday's meeting.

TV/Display Screen: A 75-inch screen has been purchased for the meeting room. The portable mount has been ordered and is pending delivery before installation can be completed.

Cemetery Mulch Request: Following a request raised at a prior meeting, Maintenance Technician Jordan assessed the cemetery area in question and determined that a portion of the bed is on a slope and will require a border or retaining structure prior to mulching. The board discussed options, with a preference expressed for larger decorative stone as a low-maintenance permanent solution rather than mulch alone. ORC Jeff Jones offered assistance with material placement.

Disconnection Notices: Of 33 accounts flagged for possible disconnection, representing $7,013.02 in unpaid balances, 19 accounts came current voluntarily by March 20th. Fourteen accounts were disconnected on March 23rd; as of the meeting date, only three remain locked. A $25 reconnect fee was assessed on all 14 disconnected accounts. The town has recouped $6,831.26 of the original balance.

Cemetery Street Road Repair: A photograph in the board packet documented a road cut on Cemetery Street that has remained unrepaired since a water leak repair in August. A traffic cone has been in place since that time. School buses have been observed driving onto the adjacent private property to navigate around the hazard. Town Clerk Rachel and Maintenance Technician Jordan discussed the possibility of a cold patch as a temporary fix, though the lack of a full perimeter border presents a challenge. ORC Jeff Jones offered to have a paving contractor contact the Clerk on Monday and coordinate with Jordan to address the repair.

15. ORC Report:

ORC Jeff Jones presented the following operational updates:

A chlorine line break was repaired near a property on Austin-Trap Hill Road at the bend before the road goes under the highway. The repair was completed the prior day.

Regarding the water meter replacement project: ORC Jones reported that after lack of communication from the project vendor, he escalated his concern directly to a senior contact at the company. An email was subsequently received on April 1st from a trainer indicating that the FCC license for the new meter system has been approved and that the units are now in production. The town expects delivery and installation scheduling information within one to two weeks.

The board discussed logistics for receiving pallet deliveries of the new meters, including whether the vendor would provide liftgate service, and whether the town's equipment is adequate to offload the pallets.

A fire hydrant on Austin-Mount Road has been awaiting repair due to a back-ordered stem part. The stem has since arrived, but a set of bolts is still outstanding before the repair can be completed.

16. Maintenance Report:

Maintenance Technician Jordan Church reported the following activities completed in preparation for the spring season:

All mowing equipment, weed eaters, and blowers were serviced. The carburetor on the concrete saw was cleaned and the saw is now operational after a period of disuse.

A 250th Anniversary USA banner was installed on the town's frontage. A second banner is available, and longer poles were ordered to accommodate the larger banner size; installation of the remaining banner is pending.

Spring mowing operations were completed at the water tower site and Town Hall.

Water meter checks were completed across the service area. Biannual end-of-line blow-offs have been completed for the current cycle.

The Mayor noted that the upcoming Memorial Day observance should be added to Tuesday's regular meeting agenda for discussion.

The meeting adjourned informally following the close of the maintenance report.

Rachel DeGroat

Rachel DeGroat, Town Clerk