Minutes

Town Of Ronda Work Session

June 5, 2026, 6:00 PM

The Ronda Board of Commissioners met on Friday, January 9th, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. with the following members present: Commissioner Chris Nelson, Commissioner Kevin Reece, Commissioner Helen Porter, and Town Clerk Rachel DeGroat.

Member of the Public Present: Victor Varella, Jerry Masterson, Matthew Foster, ORC Jeff Jones and Maintenance Staff Jordan Church.

Items for Discussion:

1. Mayor Report
2. Acceptance of Mayor Gerald Masterson Resignation
3. Cancellation of Subscription to Journal Patriot
4. Subscribing to Clerk Minutes – Transcription Services
5. Proclamation of June Being Faith, Family & Freedom Month
6. Authority/Chain of Command
7. Old Traphill Road Drainage – Repairs Estimate
8. Status of $3.5 Grant and Oversight & Authority Over Open Projects
9. ORC Report
10. Grace Clinic Annual Giving
11. Current Situation & Responsibility Regarding Consumption Discrepancies Between Ronda & Elkin
12. Role of the Town Clerk
13. Removal of the following yearly services:
    a. CINTAS
    b. S&J Septic Pumping
    c. Quality Control
14. Schedule of Fees for FY27
15. Vacant Lot Monthly Meter Charge
16. Continuation of FY27 Budget
17. Administrative/Clerk Report
18. Maintenance Report

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Pro Tem Kevin (acting in the absence of Mayor Gerald Masterson).

Invocation was led by Commissioner Foster, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance, led by Commissioner Nelson.

Present: Commissioner Foster, Commissioner Nelson, Commissioner Munsey, Commissioner Reece (acting chair/Mayor Pro Tem Kevin), Commissioner Porter (Finance Officer) Absent: Mayor Gerald Masterson (resigned effective this date).

1. Mayor Report

Mayor Pro Tem Kevin noted that he had no formal report to present and the board moved on to the next item.

2. Acceptance of Mayor Gerald Masterson Resignation

Town Clerk Rachel DeGroat read aloud the resignation letter submitted by Mayor Gerald Masterson, which stated: "Due to health reasons and a continuing dysfunctional board, I must resign from the position of mayor effective today, June 5th, 2026, at 3 PM." The letter was delivered to the Town Clerk by Mayor Masterson in person. The board entertained and approved a motion to accept the resignation.

> Commissioner Porter made the motion to accept the resignation of Mayor Gerald Masterson and was seconded by Commissioner Nelson. The motion carried by unanimous vote.

3. Cancellation of Subscription to Journal Patriot

Mayor Pro Tem Kevin raised the matter of the town's existing subscription to the Wilkes Journal Patriot, noting that staff had reported the paper was routinely discarded and not read. He pointed out that the Wilkes Record, a competing local news source, is available digitally at no cost. Given the board's focus on reducing expenses wherever possible, he proposed canceling the subscription. The annual cost was noted to be $45. The board agreed that any dollar saved was beneficial.

> Motion to cancel the subscription to the Wilkes Journal Patriot was made by Commissioner Munsey and seconded by Commissioner Foster. The motion carried unanimously.

4. Subscribing to Clerk Minutes – Transcription Services

Town Clerk DeGroat informed the board that she had researched transcription solutions and, utilizing a 14-day free trial, had prepared the April and May work session minutes using a program called Clerk Minutes, a platform commonly used by municipalities. She explained that the software accepts audio file uploads, generates a transcription, and produces formatted meeting minutes. The board reviewed sample minutes included in the meeting packet.

Discussion followed regarding the accuracy of transcription, specifically whether verbatim records could be retrieved in addition to the generated summary minutes. Clerk DeGroat confirmed that the full transcription is accessible within the software platform. The cost for an subscription was noted to be $99. Jordan Church was acknowledged for having helped identify the program.

The board expressed general satisfaction with the product and agreed to review the sample minutes before Tuesday's regular board meeting, at which point a formal vote to approve the subscription purchase would be placed on the agenda.

5. Proclamation of June Being Faith, Family & Freedom Month

Mayor Pro Tem Kevin introduced a proposed proclamation declaring June 2026 as Faith, Family & Freedom Month in the Town of Ronda, offered in contrast to the Governor's designation of June as Pride Month. He stated that the proclamation reflects the values of many citizens in the community.

Clerk DeGroat read the proclamation into the record in full. The proclamation cited the preamble of the North Carolina Constitution's acknowledgment of Almighty God, referenced the 2012 North Carolina constitutional amendment defining marriage as between one man and one woman, and noted other historical June designations including Father's Day and D-Day. It declared that June is more fittingly designated to faith, family, and freedom, while also affirming the town's opposition to unlawful discrimination against any person.

The board noted that the town attorney had reviewed the proclamation. It was requested that the full text with the town attonrey be distributed to all board members for review prior to Tuesday's regular meeting. The board agreed to place the proclamation on the agenda for a formal vote at the next board meeting, with an opportunity for public comment.

6. Authority/Chain of Command

Mayor Pro Tem Kevin opened discussion on the need to establish a clearer chain of command for the town's day-to-day operations. He proposed that contractors and personnel related to maintenance should report to ORC Jeff Jones, while office and administrative contractors should report to Town Clerk DeGroat. He emphasized that the board should have confidence in its employees to make decisions within their scope, and that board members should not individually interfere in those operational areas.

Commissioner Foster expressed strong support for the concept, noting that Clerk DeGroat carried a significant and growing workload—including finances, grant contracts, and administrative duties—and that the board had at times improperly added to her responsibilities. He suggested that commissioners could be designated as department heads over areas such as water, streets, and sanitation, a structure he noted was consistent with guidance previously provided by the League of Municipalities.

Commissioner Nelson raised concerns directly about past conduct, stating firmly that no individual board member has the authority to act on behalf of the board, to make representations to outside parties as if speaking for the board, or to threaten the job or livelihood of any town employee or contractor. Commissioner Nelson addressed Commissioner Munsey by name regarding these concerns, and a heated exchange followed. Commissioner Munsey disputed the characterizations. Mayor Pro Tem Kevin called for order and redirected the board toward a constructive resolution.

The board ultimately agreed that no individual commissioner or mayor should threaten the employment of any employee or contractor independently, and that all such matters must be brought before the full board. Commissioner Munsey stated he had made no such threats.

Clerk DeGroat noted that a clear chain of command and formal transition procedures would also help future boards avoid repeating historical patterns of dysfunction, particularly in light of the upcoming November election. She offered to draft a policy document outlining scope of duties for both maintenance and administrative roles, as well as a framework for board member conduct, for consideration at the July meeting. The board agreed to revisit this topic formally in July.

7. Old Traphill Road Drainage – Repairs Estimate

Commissioner Munsey introduced this item on behalf of resident Mr. Combs, who was unable to attend. He described ongoing erosion on Old Traphill Road caused by drainage issues that, if left unaddressed, would undermine any future paving efforts. The board was reminded that this drainage repair had been discussed previously and an estimate had been obtained, but the project was never executed.

ORC Jones and Commissioner Nelson confirmed that there is a sinkhole in the yard of a neighboring property owner (Daryl Combs) caused by a failed drainage pipe, which was also noted as a related concern to be addressed. The board agreed to add this matter to the Tuesday board meeting agenda and encouraged Mr. Combs to attend. The board also discussed whether other roadway areas, such as Factory Street, should be reviewed.

Mayor Pro Tem Kevin noted that the town has approximately $128,794 in Powell Bill funds available, a portion of which is currently allocated to mowing services at approximately $900 per month. The board agreed to assess priorities for the use of remaining Powell Bill funds in the context of the drainage and paving needs.

8. Status of $3.5 Grant and Oversight & Authority Over Open Projects

ORC Jones provided an update on the three active projects funded under the $3.5 million grant: the water meter replacement, the waterline extension, and the well development project.

Water Meter Replacement: ORC Jones confirmed that a pre-construction meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, June 9th at 3:30 PM at Town Hall, with a Teams link having been distributed to all board members by Clerk DeGroat. He noted that 1,400 meters had been installed in Jonesville in approximately four weeks by the same contractor, suggesting the local project would proceed rapidly. The board discussed whether more than two commissioners attending the pre-construction meeting in person would constitute a quorum issue and agreed that the meeting should be recorded and shared with any board members who do not attend in person.

Waterline Extension: Wooten Engineering rep Cameron confirmed that the project was set to begin the following week, with crews preparing erosion controls and establishing a storage yard at a nearby facility.

Well Development Project: ORC Jones described an ongoing email chain involving the engineers (John and Cameron from Wooten), and the grant administrator (Dee) at the Division of Water Infrastructure (DWI). The central issue was the timeline and whether grant funds have a hard spend-by deadline. The engineers indicated a 9-month timeline to completion, which would require advertising the project in June or July. Dee had raised concern about whether funding would remain available past a potential end date, while the engineers expressed their understanding that since APR funding had been spent out, the remaining obligated funds may not carry the same year-end deadline.

ORC Jones stated that he had called engineer John directly and requested written clarification from Dee at DWI regarding the deadline. As of the meeting date, that confirmation had not been received. He committed to following up Monday morning.

Water Tower Cleaning and Pipe Bids: ORC Jones noted he was also working on updated bids for water tower cleaning and related pipe work and expected to hear back from vendors by the end of the following week, with the goal of presenting quotes to the board by end of June.

Future Infrastructure – River Crossing: Mayor Pro Tem Kevin clarified for the board that running water under the river to Ronda Clingman School had never been part of the $3.5 million grant scope. A separate funding note had been submitted to the General Assembly for that purpose but was not funded. The approximately $1.8 million in remaining ARP/Circuit City community funds may potentially be applicable to future water infrastructure, though the board acknowledged that railroad coordination would be required before any such project could advance. Clerk DeGroat recommended looping in grant consultant Wooten to determine what "color of money" the remaining ARP funds represent and whether they can be applied to that project.

Elkin Meter and Consumption Discrepancies: ORC Jones reported that the town's most recent Local Water Supply Plan showed only a 12% unaccountable water loss—within state standards. He noted that efforts are underway to systematically document all water service connections, including an investigation of service lines on River Bottom Road where no active accounts are on record. He raised a long-standing concern that the Elkin billing meter at the booster station had not been properly calibrated or tested since its installation in 2012, and that the check valves (RPZ valves) had similarly not been tested since that time. He stated his intention to request formal written confirmation from Elkin regarding meter testing and calibration history.

The board agreed that Clerk DeGroat should try to locate Mayor Cruz's former town email account, which was believed to contain a state communication confirming that the grant deadline did not apply to this project. Access was complicated by the fact that the former mayor's password had not been transferred upon her departure.

9. ORC Report

ORC Jones reported that a new tap was installed on Macedonia Church Road using a boring contractor, who completed the bore and conduit installation efficiently. He noted that he and Maintenance Technician Jordan Church planned to personally walk River Bottom Road on the next available dry day to document all water service connections and photograph conditions as part of an ongoing effort to account for the town's water usage.

ORC Jones also discussed the anticipated impact of the new AMI water meters on revenue, projecting that new meter data would reveal significantly greater accuracy compared to the aging existing meters—some of which were estimated to be underreporting by as much as 5-6%. He noted that comparable data from before and after the meter installation would be available for analysis.

10. Grace Clinic Annual Giving

Mayor Pro Tem Kevin introduced the topic of the town's annual donation to Grace Clinic, a 100% nonprofit organization serving Wilkes County residents who cannot afford primary care, prescription medications, or other basic health services. The town had historically contributed $2,000 annually. Given current budget constraints, Mayor Pro Tem Kevin proposed sending a $500 good-faith contribution immediately, with the remainder to be considered as a line item in the FY27 budget if funds permit.

Commissioner Nelson raised concerns based on accounts from community members who reported being turned away from the clinic and others who had allegedly used the clinic inappropriately to obtain drugs. He stated he was not comfortable approving a donation without further review and asked all board members to speak with constituents who had experience with the clinic before a decision is made. Commissioner Munsey noted that the clinic had recently constructed a new facility, suggesting it had substantial donor support.

Mayor Pro Tem Kevin acknowledged the concerns and agreed to defer the matter to the July meeting, at which point the board would discuss it in the context of the finalized FY27 budget.

11. Current Situation & Responsibility Regarding Consumption Discrepancies Between Ronda & Elkin

This item was addressed during the combined discussion under the ORC Report and the $3.5 Grant status update. ORC Jones, Commissioner Foster, and Clerk DeGroat outlined an ongoing collaborative effort to reconcile the town's production records with Elkin's billing records, systematically document all metered connections, and seek calibration confirmation for the Elkin billing meter. A formal review process was discussed, with ORC Jones and Maintenance Technician Church committing to physically inspect and document connections along River Bottom Road.

12. Role of the Town Clerk

This item was addressed in the context of the broader discussion under Agenda Item 6 (Authority/Chain of Command). The board acknowledged that the Town Clerk had been tasked with duties beyond the statutory scope of her role, including serving informally as budget officer, administrator, and grant liaison. Clerk DeGroat was asked to prepare a formal scope of duties document for presentation at the July meeting.

13. Removal of the Following Yearly Services

a. CINTAS

Clerk DeGroat reported that the town had paid approximately $6,500 year-to-date to Cintas for services including Maintenance Technician Church's uniform service ($13–$14/week), air freshener replacement, floor mat rentals, and an AED inspection and medical supply cabinet servicing in the maintenance building. The board agreed that these services were excessive given the town's financial constraints.

The board discussed transitioning Maintenance Technician Church to a flat annual clothing and equipment allowance. ORC Jones noted that a comparable transition in another municipality had been handled with an $800 annual allotment covering pants, shirts, a hoodie, and boots per employee per year.

> Motion to cancel the Cintas contract and approve an annual uniform and equipment allowance of $800 to Maintenance Technician Jordan Church for the purchase of uniforms, boots, and coveralls was made by Commissioner Nelson and seconded by Commissioner Fos. The motion carried.

b. S&J Septic Pumping

The board discussed the portable restroom unit located at the town's park facility, serviced by S&J Septic Pumping at an annual cost of approximately $3,000. Concerns were raised about the cleanliness and condition of the unit. Commissioner Nelson acknowledged that regular pumping is necessary as a baseline standard and suggested the board look for an alternative vendor rather than immediately canceling the service. Mayor Pro Tem Kevin asked ORC Jones and Maintenance Technician Church to obtain quotes from alternative providers and report back in July, at which point the board would determine whether to continue, cancel, or replace the service.

c. Quality Control

The board discussed the pest control contract with Quality Control, noting that the service appeared minimal in scope—visits are infrequent and consist of limited application. Year-to-date costs were approximately $99. The board discussed whether Maintenance Technician Church could be authorized to purchase and apply pest control products directly from a hardware store as a cost-saving alternative. ORC Jones agreed to obtain quotes from alternative providers, including Dodson and Ridabug, for comparison. The matter was deferred to the July meeting.

14. Schedule of Fees for FY27

Clerk DeGroat presented two documents in the board packet: the current schedule of fees and a proposed schedule for FY27. The proposed schedule includes a water surcharge agreed upon during a prior draft budget session, as well as a new tiered commercial/industrial rate structure proposed during the budget luncheon by Commissioner Foster. The commercial/industrial rates—applicable to accounts with larger-sized meters such as the middle school, high school, Dollar General, and the factory—were derived from the rate study submitted by Wooten Engineering.

The board noted that no formal action can be taken on the schedule of fees until after the public budget hearing, scheduled for June 25th. This item was presented for awareness and discussion in preparation for a subsequent budget work session.

A follow-up budget luncheon was scheduled for Monday, June 8th at 11:30 AM to continue refinement of the FY27 budget before the public hearing. All available board members were invited to attend.

15. Vacant Lot Monthly Meter Charge

Finance Officer Helen raised the matter of reinstating a minimum meter fee for vacant lots with installed meters that are not actively being used. She noted that this had historically been the policy and that previous boards had relaxed enforcement. Commissioner Munsey added that the policy of holding property owners responsible for minimum fees—and charging a higher deposit for rental properties—had also been part of prior practice.

Clerk DeGroat recommended consulting with town attorney regarding whether landlords can be held responsible for water accounts at tenant-occupied properties. The board agreed to include this item in the ongoing budget discussions and directed Clerk DeGroat to follow up with the town attorney.

16. Continuation of FY27 Budget

The board confirmed that the public budget hearing is scheduled for June 25, 2026, and that the board cannot finalize the budget until immediately following that hearing. A budget luncheon is scheduled for Monday, June 8th at 11:30 AM to continue working through remaining budget items.

Discussion touched on anticipated improvements to revenue, including new residential water taps being added in town, anticipated accuracy gains from the new AMI meters, the end of the Boaz consulting contract in July (saving $2,500/month), and the elimination of several service contracts. Commissioner Munsey raised the question of employee compensation increases, particularly for Clerk DeGroat and Maintenance Technician Church. The board agreed that raises should be considered in the context of the finalized budget rather than speculated upon in advance.

The possibility of issuing one-time bonuses of $500 to employees was briefly discussed, with some members expressing support and others urging caution until the full financial picture was clear. The board agreed to revisit employee compensation formally during the closed session at Tuesday's regular board meeting.

17. Administrative/Clerk Report

Clerk DeGroat reported that she had contacted an HVAC service company, which would be visiting Tuesday to assess the two HVAC units at Town Hall. The estimated cost would be approximately $110 per unit, for a total of $220 annually, and she recommended this be included as a line item in the FY27 budget. She also noted that she is continuing efforts to schedule the required certification class for board members, having contacted the League of Municipalities twice without receiving a response regarding virtual options.

18. Maintenance Report

Maintenance Technician Jordan Church reported the following:

- Attended the Rural Water Conference, gaining useful contacts for future operational needs.
- Completed spring cleanup.
- Completed monthly meter reads.
- Coordinated the new tap installation on Macedonia Church Road with the boring contractor.
- Completed installation of a retaining wall at the town cemetery with assistance from staff, with plans to return to apply mulch later in the week.

Closed Session Pursuant to N.C.G.S § 143-310.11 (a)(1) and (6) for Personnel Matters

a. Jordan Church Performance Review
b. Rachel DeGroat Performance Review

The board agreed to defer personnel performance reviews for Maintenance Technician Jordan Church and Town Clerk Rachel DeGroat to the closed session at the conclusion of Tuesday's regular board meeting, to allow Commissioner Foster to participate.

Motion to exit out of Closed Session was made by Commissioner Nelson and seconded by Commissioner Porter. The motion carried.

Motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Nelson and all stood in agreement.

Minutes prepared by the Office of the Town Clerk, Town of Ronda, North Carolina.

Rachel DeGroat

Rachel DeGroat, Town Clerk