MINUTES
TOWN OF RONDA REGULAR BOARD MEETING
June 9, 2026, 6:00 PM

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Pro-Tem Kevin Reece at approximately 6:07 PM at 123 Chatham Street, Ronda, NC 28670.

Present: Mayor Pro-Tem Kevin Reece, Commissioner Foster, Commissioner Nelson, Commissioner Helen (Financial Officer) Absent: Commissioner Munsey, Mayor Masterson (recently resigned).

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

AGENDA: No discussion was recorded.

MINUTES: Mayor Pro-Tem Reece noted that the complete minutes were not reprinted in the packet, as Clerk Rachel DeGroat had previously distributed them at the work session in the interest of saving paper. Clerk DeGroat clarified that the minutes covered the April work session, April board meeting, and May work session, with the May board meeting minutes still pending file compression for transcription.

> Commissioner Nelson made the motion to approve the minutes as presented at the work session and seconded by Commissioner Foster. The motion carried.

DISCUSSION OF EXPENDITURES: Expenditure documents were made available to the public. No substantive discussion was recorded.

Reports:

YVSA: Victor Varella was unable to attend. Clerk DeGroat relayed on his behalf that the Yadkin Valley Sewer Authority approved its budget for the upcoming year, which includes an increase in the volumetric rate of $0.25 per 1,000 gallons. The base rate will remain unchanged.

HCCOG: Commissioner Munsey, who sits on the High Country Council of Governments board, was not present. No report was given.

Wilkes EDC: Mayor Pro-Tem Reece reported that no EDC meeting had taken place. Clerk DeGroat noted that the EDC typically meets on the third Friday of the month, and because June's third Friday falls on a holiday, it remains unclear whether the meeting will be rescheduled or resumed in July.

WCC: Mayor Pro-Tem Reece noted he had missed the Wilkes Chamber meeting due to a prior obligation with the mayor and secretary. No report was given.

YVCC: Mayor Pro-Tem Reece reported that the Yadkin Valley Chamber representative had indicated there was nothing to report.

OPEN FORUM: One speaker, Samuel Bird, a resident of Wilkes County, addressed the Board regarding Agenda Item 8a — the Proclamation of Faith, Family, and Freedom Month. Speaking as a baptized and confirmed Christian with training in Christian theology and pastoral care, and as a former trustee of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America, Mr. Bird stated that he was troubled not by the words "faith," "family," and "freedom" themselves, but by the reported intent of the resolution as a direct political response to the recognition of June as LGBTQ Heritage Month.

Mr. Bird argued that the resolution's language — describing LGBT people in terms of "disordered lifestyles" and "conditions" — was inappropriate for a government body and inconsistent with the pastoral teachings of many Christian denominations, including the Episcopal Church and other mainline traditions. He emphasized that LGBT residents are taxpayers, church members, and community members, and that the resolution implies they stand in opposition to faith, family, and freedom, which he stated is false. He further cautioned against what he described as Christian nationalism — the merging of one version of Christian identity with political power — and argued that local government should not elevate one religious viewpoint over others or over non-religion.

Mr. Bird concluded by urging the Board to reject the resolution and redirect its focus toward tangible local concerns such as affordability, infrastructure, addiction, and public safety, stating: "Faith, rightly lived, does not fear pride. Family, rightly understood, does not exclude underrepresented people. And freedom, rightly practiced, does not require the humiliation of one's neighbors."

Mayor Pro-Tem Reece thanked Mr. Bird for his courage in speaking and acknowledged his remarks respectfully.

BOARD ACTION:

Proclamation Of Faith, Family And Freedom Month – Mayor Pro-Tem Reece responded to the public comment by stating that the town is not in the business of discriminating against any residents, including those in same-sex relationships, and that no member of the Board would condone mistreatment of any citizen. He noted that the town is in significant financial difficulty, with more than half of the general fund subsidizing a failing water system, and that his personal faith motivates him to act in alignment with what he believes honors God. He acknowledged that Commissioner Munsey had expressed opposition to the resolution at the work session but was not present at the meeting. Mayor Pro-Tem Reece stated that the proclamation had been reviewed by the town attorney and found it to present no legal issues.

Clerk DeGroat read the full text of the proclamation into the record. The proclamation references the preamble of the North Carolina Constitution and its acknowledgment of Almighty God, the 2012 North Carolina constitutional amendment defining marriage as between one man and one woman, and the town's stated opposition to designating June as Pride Month. The proclamation declares June 2026 as Faith, Family, and Freedom Month in the Town of Ronda and commends other municipalities to do the same.

> A motion to approve the Proclamation of Faith, Family, and Freedom Month was made by Commissioner Nelson and seconded by Commissioner Foster. The motion carried, with no opposition recorded.

AIM Mentor Training Opportunity - Clerk DeGroat presented an opportunity offered by the North Carolina League of Municipalities to provide free accounting instruction and mentorship training — referred to as the AIM program — to the Board and town staff. The program consists of approximately twelve subject areas, delivered over multiple sessions of two to three hours each. Clerk DeGroat's attendance at all twelve sessions would be required; Board members would be welcome to attend any sessions of their choosing. Clerk DeGroat noted that the program would be significantly beneficial to her given the financial and budgetary responsibilities she has recently taken on and recommended that Board members become more engaged with the financial operations of the town to avoid a single point of failure. Commissioner Foster asked whether he could attend a session if he happened to be present when one was scheduled, and Clerk DeGroat confirmed that it was permitted. Commissioner Nelson inquired about potential cost; Clerk DeGroat confirmed there is no charge for the program. A resolution requiring the Board's signature was included in the packet for approval.

> A motion to approve participation in the AIM Mentor Training program and to authorize execution of the associated resolution was made by Commissioner Nelson and seconded by Commissioner Reece. The motion carried unanimously.

Appoint Replacement Check Signer For Recently Resigned Mayor - Mayor Pro-Tem Reece informed the Board that following Mayor Masterson's resignation, a replacement check signer is needed. He noted that Commissioner Munsey had refused to sign a check required by contract, creating an urgent need. Mayor Pro-Tem Reece stated that while he had historically been reluctant to serve as a bank signatory, he was willing to assume responsibility in his temporary role, noting that he holds an account at the same bank and that the arrangement is practical given Commissioner Nelson's schedule as a truck driver.

A motion to approve participation in the AIM Mentor Training program and to authorize execution of the associated resolution was made by Commissioner Nelson and seconded by Commissioner Reece. The motion carried unanimously.

Vote On Clerk Minutes As Software Used For Transcription Of Meeting Minutes - Mayor Pro-Tem Reece introduced the item to formally adopt Clerk Minutes as the software platform for transcription of meeting minutes, at an annual cost of $99. Clerk DeGroat indicated the platform would save time and reduce costs associated with her labor in preparing minutes manually.

A motion to approve Clerk Minutes as the transcription software for meeting minutes was made by Mayor Pro-Tem Reece and seconded by Commissioner Foster. The motion carried unanimously.

Old Traphill Road Drainage – Repairs Estimate - Mayor Pro-Tem Reece presented a revised drainage repair estimate for Old Traphill Road from contractor Caleb Vestal. The revised quote came in at approximately $66,000, up from the original quote of approximately $55,000 obtained in August of the prior year. Clerk DeGroat attributed the increase in part to rising fuel prices and material costs. Commissioner Nelson raised a concern that fixing drainage without addressing the road surface could result in the drainage investment being undermined by continued road deterioration. Mayor Pro-Tem Reece acknowledged the concern but expressed confidence in the contractor's reputation and noted the existence of statutory protections requiring contractors to stand behind their work. Former Commissioner Collins, who resides on Old Traphill Road, was present and provided context on the scope of the drainage work — noting it involves three cement manholes and significant HDPE double-wall piping — and expressed belief that the design would address the water runoff problem. He confirmed that the work would involve minimal disruption to the road surface itself. Mayor Pro-Tem Reece noted that the remaining budget after this expenditure would still allow for patching potholes and addressing drainage issues on Factory Street. He also mentioned having spoken with a resident on the road who was supportive of the project and agreed to consult with former Commissioner Collins about whether residents would support the installation of speed bumps to address related traffic concerns on the street.

A motion to approve the revised drainage repair estimate for Old Traphill Road was made by Mayor Pro-Tem Reece and seconded Commissioner Nelson. The motion carried.

SOW For Building Renovation/Repairs For Grant Application - Commissioner Foster provided an update on the town hall building renovation effort. He reported meeting with a contractor alongside Commissioner Munsey but noted that the town was not yet far enough along in its planning to answer the contractor's questions about the desired scope and style of renovation. Commissioner Foster stated that the contractor had since been asked to provide separate estimates: one for repairing and restoring the existing building, and one for a new structure, with a local vendor expected to provide a quote on a new building comparable in quality to the existing one. Commissioner Foster suggested soliciting input from town residents — potentially through a flyer included in water bills — asking how they would like the town hall to look, including choices about siding, windows, and interior finishes. He noted that Clerk DeGroat's office is in particular need of modernization, including updated equipment and functional computers, regardless of the aesthetic decisions made for the building. The Board agreed generally that moving forward requires clear answers about desired outcomes before contractors can be engaged in earnest, and that the current construction activity on the building must be completed first. Commissioner Foster also noted that an Oak Ridge Customs contractor was scheduled to install a new basement door on Thursday.

This item was informational in nature. No vote was taken.

Waddell Street – Solid Waste Concern From Wilkes County - Mayor Pro-Tem Reece introduced this item, which had been added to the agenda based on an email received from the Wilkes County Fire Marshal regarding a fire and explosion on Waddell Street. The fire, which produced black smoke visible as far as Elkin, was ruled incendiary due to the absence of any ignition source in the pile of materials that burned. A follow-up visit by investigators on June 5th yielded no additional information. The Fire Marshal's office expressed concern about a potential solid waste violation and noted that materials in the roadway were obstructing access to the end of the street, which would prevent emergency vehicles from reaching the property of the resident at the end of the road. The county landfill manager indicated that because the property is within town limits, the matter falls under the town's jurisdiction. Board members and Mayor Pro-Tem Reece discussed the situation with sensitivity, noting that the property owner is a well-known community member who is disabled and has lived there for many years. Mayor Pro-Tem Reece disclosed that his name appears on the land deed as a protective buffer, at the request of a deceased family member, to prevent the property from being sold or lost. Several Board members expressed that the individual is a valued member of the community who has helped many neighbors, but that the accumulation of materials — much of which has reportedly been dropped off by others — has created a legitimate safety concern, particularly for Clerk DeGroat's employee Jordan who must access the property to read the water meter. Commissioner Nelson volunteered to speak with the property owner personally about clearing access around the water meter and about communicating to others that the property should no longer be used as an informal drop-off location. Mayor Pro-Tem Reece expressed support for this approach, stating that fines would be counterproductive given the owner's financial circumstances, and that a cooperative, community-based solution was preferable. No formal vote was taken.

Proposed Changes To FY27 Draft Budget & Schedule Of Fees

a. Governing Body: Contracted Services - Mayor Pro-Tem Reece proposed reorganizing the Governing Body's contracted services budget line into a "Professional Services" category with three distinct subcategories: attorney fees, auditor fees, and legal filings. The overall budgeted amount would remain unchanged, but separating the categories would allow for more precise tracking and prevent any single expense from inadvertently consuming funds intended for another. Clerk DeGroat confirmed this change would be reflected in the budget presented to the public at the June 25th public hearing, after which the Board would vote to adopt the final budget. No objection was raised. The Board discussed a proposal to increase the travel budget line under Streets from $1,500 to $5,000, reflecting actual travel expenses incurred by board members attending meetings and advocacy trips on behalf of the town. Mayor Pro-Tem Reece noted that he had made multiple trips to the General Assembly and to Blowing Rock to meet with the Department of Agriculture regarding grant opportunities and was confident the current $1,500 allotment would be exceeded. Commissioner Foster suggested leaving the line at $1,500 and amending the budget during the year if necessary, arguing that the constraint would encourage more deliberate consideration of whether each trip is necessary, and that the board has the authority to amend the budget as needed. Mayor Pro-Tem Reece acknowledged the merit of that approach but expressed a preference for avoiding mid-year amendments where possible. The Board agreed to leave the travel line at $1,500, with the understanding that it could be revisited and amended if expenditures require it.

b. Streets: Professional Services - The title of this line item would be changed from "Contracted Services" to "Professional Services."

c. **Out Of Town Security Deposit -** The Board discussed the current security deposit of $125 for new water service connections, which applies equally to in-town and out-of-town customers. Mayor Pro-Tem Reece proposed increasing the out-of-town deposit to $250 to better protect the town in cases where customers leave outstanding balances. Commissioner Nelson emphasized the importance of not discouraging potential customers in the county from connecting to the system. Commissioner Foster noted that the deposit should be high enough to serve as a meaningful deterrent but not so high as to drive customers away. After discussion, the Board agreed to raise the security deposit to $200 for all customers — both in-town and out-of-town — applying the change uniformly. Clerk DeGroat confirmed the change applies only to new service connections.

d. **Reconnect Fees (Non-Service Hours) -** The Board discussed increasing after-hours reconnect fees to better account for the overtime, fuel, and vehicle wear-and-tear costs incurred when staff must respond outside normal business hours. Mayor Pro-Tem Reece noted that the out-of-town reconnect requires additional drive time and therefore warrants a slightly higher fee than in-town service. The Board agreed to raise both fees and to add a $10 differential for out-of-town reconnects to account for the additional travel involved. The Board also discussed the relationship between enforcement of disconnect notices and the reduction of outstanding balances, agreeing that timely enforcement was the most effective tool for minimizing losses.

e. **Meter Testing -** The Board reviewed a provision allowing the town to charge customers for meter testing. After discussion, it was determined that this fee applies when a customer repeatedly requests meter testing to contest their bill. The Board noted that with the installation of new meters expected to be completed by June 29th, many disputes related to inaccurate readings would likely become a non-issue. The Board agreed to leave the meter testing fee structure in place but took no formal action, noting it would become largely moot once the new meters were operational.

f. **Meter Tampering (1st & 2nd Offense) -** Mayor Pro-Tem Reece reported that the town has documented multiple instances of meter tampering, including the removal of locks and the bypassing of meters, which have been referred to law enforcement. He noted that tampering with a water supply is a felony offense and that the current fine structure — $250 for a first offense and $1,000 for a second — is insufficient to deter the behavior or reflect the severity of the offense. Commissioner Nelson agreed and suggested the minimum first offense fine should be $500. After further discussion, the Board reached consensus to propose increasing the first offense fine to $500 and the second offense fine to $3,000, to be applicable only upon conviction.

Closed Session:

Mayor Pro-Tem Reece announced a closed session pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 143-318.11(a)(1) and (a)(6) for the purpose of considering confidential personnel matters.

1. **Jordan Church Performance Review -** Prior to entering closed session, the Board discussed informally that both Jordan Church and Clerk Rachel DeGroat had performed exceptionally well under difficult circumstances, including the departure of former staff and the assumption of additional duties. Mayor Pro-Tem Reece and Commissioner Nelson emphasized that both employees had exceeded expectations, with Jordan Church taking on maintenance tasks and additional meter reading routes without complaint.
2. **Rachel DeGroat Performance Review -** The Board emerged from closed session and, following deliberation, Mayor Pro-Tem Reece made a motion to award both Jordan Church and Clerk Rachel DeGroat a one-time bonus of $750 each, effective at the next check run. The Board also agreed to place a review of both employees' hourly compensation on the August board meeting agenda, at which point updated meter data and budget conditions would provide a more complete financial picture.

A motion to award a one-time bonus of $750 to both Jordan Church and Rachel DeGroat, and to schedule a review of their hourly compensation at the August board meeting, was made by Mayor Pro-Tem Reece and seconded by Commissioner Nelson. The motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned.

Rachel DeGroat

Rachel DeGroat, Town Clerk