

Minutes

Spring Hope Board of Commissioners Meeting

April 7, 2025

A regular meeting of the Town of Spring Hope Board of Commissioners was held at 7 p.m. at the Spring Hope Town Hall in the Commissioner's room.

Members Present: Mayor William Pritchard, Commissioners Eric Gainey, Brenda Lucas, Drew Griffin, Brent Cone, and Tommy Toney.

Also present, the Town Manager Andrew DeIonno, Town Clerk Michele Collins, Town Attorney Mark Edwards, Code Enforcement Officer Shawn Lucas, Chief Nathan Gant, and Public Works Director Bobby Ball.

Mayor Pritchard called the meeting to order and led the pledge of allegiance.

Commissioner Cone made a motion to approve the minutes from the March 3rd meeting; Commissioner Gainey seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Cone made the motion to go into closed session; Commissioner Griffin seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Cone made a motion to go back into general session; Commissioner Lucas seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Continued Items

Mr. DeIonno stated that in the packets that each Commissioner received they have the determination from the North Carolina Natural and Cultural Resources and Parks Department regarding the disposition and anything that can happen with the land where the Boy Scout Hut is located. Mr. DeIonno also stated that depending on how the board wants to proceed with the Boy Scout Hut they would have to explore what they would need to do to comply with the rules of the grant per the state. In the determination letter from the State of North Carolina it states that the state was not aware that the Boy Scout Hut existed at the time of the grant being conferred. If the Town of Spring Hope and the Town of Spring Hope Commissioners can prove that the Boy Scout Hut existed at the time that the grant was conferred, then it can remain how it sits and be used for any public purpose. If they cannot prove that the Boy Scout Hut existed at the time of the grant being conferred, they would have to receive some form of dispensation for NC Parks regarding the utilization of that facility. Mr. DeIonno states that it all depends on what the board wants to do.

Commissioner Griffin asked, "we should be able to prove that the building was there prior to 1979, correct?". Mr. DeIonno stated that he was not able to find any documentation.

Commissioner Griffin stated they may be able to go back and do some research to see if they can

find something as simple as a newspaper with a picture of the Scout Hut in Spring Hope prior to 1979 that would prove its existence. Mr. DeIonno stated that he asked a couple of the members of the historical association to see if they could come up with or find something like that, a newspaper article, a photograph, or something like that.

Mayor Pritchard said that they would love to see something like this happen, but due to government overreach, which he said he is not a fan of, they have some say so in what happens with the Boy Scout Hut. He also said the town and the commissioners just need to work with the historical society to create a type of documentation, as Commissioner Griffin said, to prove its existence and Mr. DeIonno could navigate and communicate with the state of North Carolina to get that documentation and asked Mr. DeIonno what the next step is moving forward.

Mr. DeIonno said the next step depends on whether we can prove the building existed before 1979.

Mr. DeIonno said the one question they did not answer was whether the scouts and the American Legion Post 91 constitutes a public use. He plans to question them on that again.

New Items

Mayor Pritchard said the proposed resolution from Representative Chesser and Nash County Commissioners creating a Southern Nash Water and Sewer Authority. There were representatives from Nash County present. They had a chance to speak.

Mr. DeIonno said the board has told him many times that they want to maintain independent utilities. He said that his stance since day one has been to help the town achieve that goal and he recommends that the town maintains independent utilities.

Mr. Jonathan Boone, Deputy County Manager, comes to the podium to speak. He said the resolution that was presented and the project they are working on that there are not really any implications for the entities that would be a partner on this project. The intent of the project is to develop a regional wastewater plant that would serve as a means of treatment and disposal for any of the entities/any wholesale customer that the project would serve. He said that Nash County would be a member of the Southern Nash County Water and Sewer Authority along with whichever jurisdiction chooses to become a part of the authority. They would operate a plant, lift stations, and force mains to bring the wastewater to the plant and treat it. But individual entities such as Nash County, Bailey, Spring Hope, or Middlesex would still operate their own systems, but they would essentially be a wholesale customer of the plant. Mr. Jonathan Boone said that they are trying to determine what the needs are of these areas in Southern Nash County. He states that the county's primary interest is industrial development.

Mayor Pritchard asked to verify that Nash County is a customer of the City of Rocky Mount and what that process is like.

Commissioner Griffin asked to verify where the county gets their drinking water. Mr. Boone stated that they source all the water from the City of Rocky Mount, but they are working on obtaining a greater groundwater supply. Mayor Pritchard asked Commissioner Griffin what he thinks about the Town of Spring Hope becoming a provider and they become a customer of the Town of Spring Hope. Commissioner Griffin said that he is against it because he feels as though the City of Rocky Mount does not have adequate resources to support all the proposed areas. As well as, when the Town of Spring Hope was having troubles with their water and sewer system, the county was nowhere to be found, and he did not understand how this would benefit Spring Hope. Commissioner Griffin feels as though the town is being insulted because they are frequently mentioned in the plans for the resolution, but the county has not come to talk to the town until now.

Commissioner Griffin asked Mr. Boone to clarify that if there is a resolution and if that resolution comes to fruition the next step would be to apply for grant money to build the proposed plant. He also asked if the more members the proposed authority has will help the authority gain more funding. Mr. Boone said that there is an advantage to having more members and the more members the authority has the more attractive it looks to the state and federal government in terms of offering money to build the project.

Mr. Boone said the entities that would be part of that authority would have a voice and a role in how the plant would be operated, funded, and the rates that are set.

Commissioner Griffin asked Mr. Boone to clarify his last statement.

Mr. Boone said that even if a member of the authority does not use the plant, they will still have input into how the plant would be operated and the rates that are set.

Commissioner Griffin and Mr. Boone both agreed that it is challenging to discuss a topic when all the details are not yet known.

Commissioner Griffin asked where the authority would get credits from to discharge into the basin and the basin somewhere along the tar river in the southern part of Nash County. Mr. Boone said the credits would come from the state, the base authorities, private mitigation banks, and the state mitigation bank.

Commissioner Griffin said, "let's say the authority is built, it goes through gets money, and for whatever reason there is not industrial development or any growth within these town, Bailey or Middlesex and we have spent millions of dollars on this plant and we're not treating enough wastewater, we can't have the authority going in the hole" Commissioner Griffin is concerned that the entities within the authority will get charged extra unexpected costs to keep the authority afloat if a situation like this were too happen.

Mayor Pritchard asked Mr. Boone if the authority would control the growth that happens by denying industrial business access to the wastewater treatment plant. Mr. Boone said the

authority would likely enter into contracts with their customers and allocate a certain amount of capacity to that customer.

Commissioner Gainey asked if it is solely about a lift stations and a plant, why is it called the Southern Nash Water and Sewer Authority.

Mr. Boone said, "it's really about...the instrument that the state has established in the general statutes... but there's been no discussion about it being a plant that treats both types of water".

Commissioner Gainey is worried about each of these small towns' water rights being taken away if they become a part of the authority because of the proposed name of the authority.

Commissioner Griffin said, for example the Town of Spring Hope has their own water and sewer systems and if they wanted to recruit industrial businesses they could so long as they did whatever it takes to make sure their water and sewer systems are not over capacity.

Commissioner Griffin is also worried about developers going to the authority to propose their project versus the town because the authority will likely have a much larger capacity compared to the town. It could potentially take away business/autonomy from the town.

Mr. Boone said he thinks it would do the opposite; he thinks that it would give the town the flexibility to extend its infrastructure to serve that development. It would give the town an alternative route for the excess wastewater especially if it would be too long of a process to expand the town's wastewater treatment facilities

Commissioner Lucas asked; who is funding this, are you going to try to get this done through grants or what?

Mr. Boone said that the goal would be to try and leverage as many state and federal grants as possible to make the project a reality.

Commissioner Lucas asked what happens if they do not get enough funding.

Mr. Boone said the authority would have to make the decision of "can we bridge the gap" and how much do we have to charge if we bridge the gap. Which creates the question is it too costly for the entities/members of the authority and would it be cost effective.

Commissioner Lucas said she knows that nothing is free and that this is going to cost, and Mr. Boone cannot tell them at the meeting what it is going to cost. We're not paying anything now and we are not obligated to pay anything now. We are self-sufficient currently and thinks that the town is doing well.

Commissioner Lucas said she is from the old school, and she is skeptical when someone brings something of this nature to her. She asked Mr. Boone "how is it going benefit me/the town?" and "How is it going to benefit you/the county/the Southern Nash Water and Sewer Authority?". Commissioner Lucas also said that she thinks someone has figured out a plan that will benefit them more than it will benefit these small towns in southern Nash County.

Mr. Boone said that it is optional whether these individual small towns join the authority and unless they join the authority, they will not have an obligation to the authority, and it will not affect them.

Mayor Pritchard said there has been a lot of information covered and that everyone is aware that this project is still very preliminary, and no decisions have been made yet.

Commissioner Cone said that he shares many of the same concerns as Commissioner Lucas and Commissioner Griffin.

Commissioner Cone said to Mr. Boone, it looks suspect that all the years the Town of Spring Hope was struggling, it seemed as though no one was paying attention and now that the town is doing much better it seems like everyone is now paying attention.

Commissioner Griffin stated that the chances of any of these small towns making improvements to their existing systems or expanding their existing systems is slim to none once they join the authority.

Mayor Pritchard moved onto the Disposition of the Community Building and said that they have an engineer's report.

Mr. DeIonno said the town has commissioned a structural engineer to evaluate the community building because it has been closed for a long time. The structural engineer made a wide-ranging report with some recommendations on some of the issues such as moisture issues and water infiltration.

Mr. DeIonno said that he requested from Appian a breakdown of cost estimates for what it would take to get that building back. He said the estimates are just for repairing the issues, cleaning up some, and bringing them back to a state that can be used. He is not sure if that triggers something with building permits and the costs of improvements to upgrade the electrical code, plumbing code, etc. He said a project like that would cost around \$1.5 million.

Mr. DeIonno suggested that the board considers demolition because the cost of improvements is rather significant and would significantly impact on the budget.

Mayor Pritchard asked, "does the building hold any historical significance on a federal, state, or town level?" and "who is the museum under?"

Mr. DeIonno said that it is not listed on the national register and that the only old document that says it is anything other than the community building says it used to be a lodge of some sort. He said that the museum is a private entity, but it is located on the same town owned parcel as the community building. He said that area supplements the small amount of parking that the museum offers.

Mayor Pritchard asked if there were any alternative uses that were thought of.

Mr. DeIonno said that at least in the short term it would probably make a nice area for a laydown yard for the water main project where the company that gets that bid can store equipment and materials.

Commissioner Lucas asked if there is still mold in the community building. Mr. DeIonno said yes. Commissioner Lucas said, I do not see what you can do with three different types of molds."

Mr. DeIonno said that there could be an alternative uses too. He also said that it would be the town attorney's role to make sure the town was indemnified and what they do for remediation the responsibility would then go to that organization.

Commissioner Cone said that if one option is the demo of the community building and building a new structure. He wonders if they have a certain amount they were going to allocate towards the Scout Hut if they could redirect it to the new building.

Mr. DeIonno said that they can explore that option.

Mayor Pritchard suggested everyone come up with some other possibilities so that we can get closer to voting on something to do with the building.

Mr. DeIonno said that he will need some direction on what Mayor Pritchard would like them to explore. Mayor Pritchard asked if they just remediate the mold, would the building be usable or would full renovation have to be done.

Commissioner Cone and Mr. DeIonno both said that it would need full renovation and that the cost just to get rid of the mold would be \$200,000. Commissioner Cone also stated that if they just fix the mold, it will not bring everything up to compliance with code like it should. He also said that just to bring everything up to code would be nearly \$500,000. He said that he is also concerned about discovering more hidden issues once they begin work if that is the route they choose.

Commissioner Cone brought back up using that land for a community park and does not suggest using LWCF because "look at what's going on with the Scout Hut, we are locked in forever". Mr. DeIonno said that it may be possible to use town funds to build a community park so that way we do not have to rely too much on grant funds.

Mayor Pritchard asked Mr. DeIonno if it would be okay if the commissioners came up with ideas and email them to him; Mr. DeIonno said yes.

Commissioner Cone asked if we have got an estimate to demolish the community building, Mr. DeIonno said no but he is exploring that idea some more.

Commissioner Gainey makes a motion to table this item pending cost estimate for demolition; Commissioner Lucas seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Chamber Treasurer Claris Bisette stepped up to represent the car show.

Mrs. Bisette said that this will be the third car show sponsored by the Chamber. The car owners would then put the cars on display and around 12:00 pm they would be judged, given trophies, and given awards. They will have some food trucks that will be there as well as the girl scouts and Spring Hope Fire Department will be there to have their hot dogs and snacks. She said that they would begin around 8:00 am and be finished by 5:00pm with everything including cleanup.

Commissioner Gainey made a motion to approve the event permit for the Spring Hope Car Show; Commissioner Cone seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Mrs. Bisette also asked the board to consider giving permission to go ahead with the baseball tournament to be held at the town's field. She said there has been work done around the baseball field and it is a shame not to have more activity on that field. Mrs. Bisette said that she discussed with Commissioner Cone needing more activity that would involve children and families coming from Red Oak and Middlesex. She wants the other small towns surrounding us to know that we have a nice park. She said Commissioner Cone talked with Nash County recreation to help as well. She said that The Chamber will provide the financing for the officials, county employees that need to be there, and the awards. The Spring Hope Fire Dept. will be there to sell hot dogs, snacks, and drinks. It is estimated that around 500 people will be in attendance and that there will be six teams.

Commissioner Lucas asked what time does it starts? Mrs. Bisette said the first game starts at 9:00 am.

Commissioner Cone said it is expected to have some positive economic impact with people supporting local restaurants as well.

Mr. DeIonno said he talked with Chief Gant about possibly needing an officer down there with so many expected attendees. Chief Gant said no since it would not be 500 people there at one time with teams coming and going for games. Chief Gant expects no more than 100 people there at a time.

Commissioner Griffin made a motion to approve the event permit for the Little League Tournament; Commissioner Gainey seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Mrs. Bisette said that her last ask was for Chalk it Up. She explained that the idea came from one of the chamber members who went out of town last fall and the town they visited was having a chalk it up festival. It is a contest between both adults and youth. People will be assigned a section of the sidewalk. The participants must bring a sketch of what they plan to draw when they register for the festival, that way we can ensure there is nothing inappropriate drawn on the sidewalks.

Mrs. Bissette said the Spring Hope Elementary School art teachers and the Southern Nash High School art teachers have been working with the chamber to get grades 3-12 participating in the festival.

Mrs. Bissette said they have not walked the streets yet to determine what age group will be where. The chamber will furnish the chalk because they want to ensure that the chalk is water-based.

Mr. DeIonno said he will get Public Works Director Bobby Ball and his crew to power wash the chosen areas, so the kids have a clean surface to draw on.

Commissioner Cone made a motion to approve the event permit for the Chalk It Up Festival; Commissioner Gainey seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Reports

Code Enforcement Officer Shawn Lucas said they have been working on the issues and are down to the last three that he knows of. No one showed up for the hearing regarding the warehouse at the corner of E. Branch St. and S. Ash St., 217 S. Ash St. has accepted a three-phase plan to remediate her issues, and 206 S. Pine St. has been working on fixing the interior and exterior of the structure.

Chief of Police Nathan (Nate) Gant said in the past month they had four incident reports, four hundred-seven calls for service, one-hundred-sixty-two traffic stops, one-hundred-thirty-five security checks, ten vehicle accidents, seven domestic disputes, four disturbances, and seven investigations with six of those seven being cleared.

The Town Manager Andrew DeIonno said that they did have their pre-bid for the depot project, some decent firms that would prequalify for the bid did come to the pre-bid, bids are due at the end of April, need three bids and if they don't get three bids they will have to re-bid the project. The addendum from pre-bid should go out the day after this meeting. He said that the water main project with DWI was moving along and that the wells are being submitted for permits.

Commissioner Lucas asked what we are going to do about the proposed resolution. Mr. DeIonno and Commissioner Gainey say that we will possibly have to have a public hearing.

Mayor Pritchard said if we do not want to be a part of the authority we must expand.

Commissioner Cone made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Commissioner Gainey seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

With Kye Brown

Michelle L. Carter

