Town of Hot Springs
Board of Alderman Meeting
February 3, 2025

Present:

Mayor Abigail Norton
Alderman Jeanne Gentry
Alderman Wendy Stancil
Alderman Dan Myers

Fire Department –
Maintenance – Donnie Waldroup
Police Department –
DRAA – Sena Kassim
Tax Department – Laura Holloway
Zoning – Ben Houser

Mayor Norton called the Town meeting to order at 6:00pm

Mayor Norton read the public charge.

AGENDA

There wasn't anyone on the evening's Public Agenda.

PUBLIC COMMENT

TJ Phillips -- Wanting to let business owners know there are two business grants, with Rebuild. Business owners can go to the website RebuildHotSprings.Org to read the details.

Mayor Norton asked the Board for a motion to approve the January 2025 meeting minutes. Alderman Gentry made a motion to approve the minutes; Aldermen Myers and Stancil seconded the motion; all were in favor.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Scott Cauthen -- He is thinking about setting up his property for hikers to stay during the 2025 hiking season. He provided the Board with a copy of his proposed plan. There are three phases to his plan; phase one is to have camping out in his yard; phase two is to put in platforms for campers to be off the ground; and phase three would be to open the Octagon House as a hostile. Mayor Norton asked Mr. Cauthen if he had spoke with the Zoning Board Administrator, Mr. Cauthen said he understands there would be some zoning issues.

DEPARTMENTS

Maintenance – Donnie Waldroup
Mr. Waldroup said the old tractor can go up for a sealed bid auction. He will get all of the information, regarding the tractor, to Mayor Norton so that she can post the sealed bid 1auction.

Alderman Gentry asked about the title for the dump truck. She asks that Maintenance help Mayor Norton locate the title as the truck can not be filed with insurance without the original title. Mr. Waldroup said he'd look for the title.

Zoning – Ben Houser
Commented on Scott Cauthen's Public Comment regarding a place for hikers to stay. Said if the Board wants to work with Mr. Cauthen, it would be a similar process as when amended the ordinance to allow sewage handling facilities in all of the districts; it has to be announced, there has to be a public meeting with public comments. He suggests _____ special use permit. This would allow the Town to put time restrictions on the permit. This would also allow the Town to make land specifications so that not every property owner could open up their land for rental space.

The Zoning Board hasn't met since the flood, but they could hold a meeting the week of the 10th. Then the Town Board could hold a special meeting, within the time requirements, after the meeting has been publicly announced.

Mr. Houser asked the Board to extend the application fee waiver, for flood related permits, thru June [2025]. The Board had initially approved, in November 2024, to waive the application fees through the end of the year. Alderman Myers made a motion to approve the request; Alderman Stancil seconded the motion; all were in favor.

Rebuild Hot Springs Area (RHSA) – TJ Phillips
Just wanted to reiterate the information regarding the grants that are available. Information is on the website.

Tax Department – Laura Holloway
Has a property owner who has requested to make payments on their 2024 property taxes. Ms. Holloway told the Board that the property owner had agreed to make monthly payments, as she has in the past. The monthly payment would have the 2024 taxes paid within 10-months. Alderman Gentry stated that this subject needs to be discussed in Executive Session.

Ms. Holloway Told the Board that she will begin sending out Tax Delay Letters later in the week. First letters go out in February, second letters in March, and third letters in April. Ms. Holloway requested an order, from the Board, to notify property owners whose taxes have not been paid by March 1st that names, property addresses, and amounts due will be posted in the newspaper between March 1st and June 30th. Alderman Gentry stated that the Board had not previously given such an order. Alderman Stancil recalled going through the process in 2024. Alderman Gentry responded that the order had not been given in March. Ms. Holloway explained, according to §105-369(a), she could post an ad in the newspaper

as early as March; however, she said she would not post the information until May or June 2025. Alderman Gentry made a motion for the order to post delinquent tax information in the newspaper between March 1st and June 30th; Alderman Stancil seconded the motion; all were in favor.

Ms. Holloway told the Board that the Town has collected 77.36% of the billed property taxes.

Mayor Norton told the Board that the Bank contacted her regarding the remote deposits. The deposit limit had been exceeded. Mayor Norton explained to the Bank that tax bills had gone out late and we were also receiving water payments, so we had a lot more payments coming in around the same time. Mayor Norton said the Bank was okay with the explanation.

Disaster Recovery Administrative Assistant – Sena Kassim

Mayor Norton announced that Sena is our new Disaster Recovery Administrative Assistant. Ms. Kassim said that the Disaster Recovery Volunteer hours is currently at 22,000. She is working on becoming more familiar with FEMA regulations. Mayor Norton told the Board that FEMA is wanting bigger items to be donated, not food and toiletries as are currently located at the church [Baptist Church on Meadow]. Sonya Phillips told the Board that the donation center, at the church, will be moving. An inventory of items will be taken as they move.

TOWN BUSINESS

Mayor Norton

The Mayor referred the Board to the handout regarding the *Uniform Guidance Procurement Policy*. Alderman Myers said he has a concern with Section 2, C, Contract Award. The policy indicates: all contracts shall be awarded only to the lowest responsive responsible bidder possessing the ability to perform successfully under the terms and conditions of the contract. He said he doesn't like having to take the lowest bid. He explained that when a job has to be done, it's important that it gets done [in a timely manner] than having to wait months until the lowest bidder has the time to do the job. Ms. Kassim said that from what she understands, if the lowest bidder isn't chosen [by the Town], there has to be a letter explaining why the lowest bidder wasn't chosen; such as doesn't fit within the necessary timeline.

Alderman Myers said he feels the wording in Section 3, B, Clear Specifications would not allow the Town to include a timeframe requirement. Alderman Gentry said that Land of Sky may be able to provide understanding of the Procurement's wording. Mayor Norton said she would get with Land of Sky.

Resolution by the Town of Hot Springs Authorizing Increase in Micro-Purchase Threshold; Mayor Norton asked the Board if there were any questions regarding this handout. There were no questions or concerns. Alderman Myers made a motion to approve; Alderman Gentry seconded the motion; all were in favor.

Mayor Norton referred the Board to the three quotes for removing the mud from Town Hall:

1)	Global Recovery, LLC	$111,849.00
2)	SRM Servicemaster	$118,427.08
3)	Bruce Bender	$ 31,000.00

Mr. Bender is in the process of finding a place that will take the mud. Alderman Gentry asked if Mr. Bender was qualified to remove the mud. Mayor Norton said Mr. Bender did not need to be certified to do the work. Mayor Norton's said that FEMA would have questions that would need to be answered before the Town is reimbursed for the work. Mr. Bender has let Mayor Norton know he will be insured but there is question as to whether he will have insurance for the people working with him. Alderman Stancil said she'd like to give Mr. Bender some time to get things worked out, within a specified time frame. Alderman Gentry asked that Land of Sky or Ms. Kassim find out what requirements would need to be met so that FEMA would reimburse the town for the mud to be removed from the Town Hall basement. Ms. Kassim said she would look into the matter. Karen Doherty with All Hands and All Hearts added that the higher cost, from the other companies, is due to disposal fees. Karen suggested that the Board make certain Mr. Bender has a safe place to dispose of the mud and also make certain that the Town does not own mud in perpetuity. She explained that since the mud is toxic, should the toxicity leak out, the Town could be held responsible. Ms. Doherty wanted the Town to make sure they were covered and not responsible for the mud and its affects after it was removed from Town Hall. Someone asked if the toxic mud was also in the surrounding area of Town Hall. Sonya Phillips explained that there was kerosene mixed in the mud at Town Hall. Andy Fuller asked if the Town still needed the building; he suggested to sell the building and let someone else deal with the kerosene mud. Mr. Fuller is aware of an investor who may take the building off of the Town's hands. He feels that an investor could bring the building back up to code and has real value to the Town. He said the second floor could be utilized. Alderman Stancil said she met with the American Flood Coalition, Check Edwards [NC Congressman] is one of 4 people charged with reconstructing FEMA. Alderman Stancil said there are long term recovery groups who have been waiting 8-years to be reimbursed by FEMA. She suggests we consider all options, besides FEMA. David Wagnor asked if an elevator could be placed in the Town Hall building and move the Town's offices upstairs and the Town could lease the down stairs for retail. He said someone may be willing to prepay a lease and then the Town could pay for the work that needs to be done. The prepaid amount could be given back as credit for rent in the future. Sara Eavenson expressed her concern that the Town did not have the funds to do anything. She said she wonders where we are going to get the money to replace street signs, sidewalks, and other practical amenities. Mayor Norton brought the conversation back to the topic of the mud removal. The Board agreed to table the topic to the next meeting. The Board requests that Mr. Bender get his information to Mayor Norton within the next three weeks so that they can vote on the matter at the next meeting. Mayor Norton will get back with Mr. Bender and let him know what additional information the Board needs from him.

Alderman Myers told the meeting attendees that if they were aware of anyone wanting to purchase the Town Hall building to please let the Board know. Alderman Gentry reminded everyone that there will probably be opposition from the local people who have lived in town, for many years [if the Board decides to sell the Town Hall building].

Bidders for the sewer line bid for Spring Creek have until February 10th, at 2:00pm to get their bids in.

The bridge [French Broad River] is scheduled to begin next month, March. Mayor Norton said she isn't sure if NCDOT will let the bid in March or if construction will actually start. She is checking with Tyler, at DOT, to find out what will start next month.

Mayor Norton has spoke with Attorney Larry Leake asking if he would take on the position of being the Town's attorney. Mr. Leake has agreed. The monthly retainer will be $750.00 per month; this will include the monthly meetings, normal municipal work (resolutions, policies, or ordinances). Additional fees will be charged if Mr. Leake has to open a file for the Town. Mayor Norton asked the Board for a motion to approve Mr. Leake as the Attorney for the Town; Alderman Gentry made a motion to approve; Alderman Myers seconded the motion; all were in favor.

Alderman Stancil

Alderman Stancil asked about the Fairview water situation. She said she spoke with someone at the Department Environmental Quality and they seemed to be surprised that the County had the money allocated to the Fairview water project. She said there are 20 families without water in Fairview. Mayor Norton said the money is allocated - $2.9-million; McGill has won the bid as the engineering firm; McGill will be getting the right-of-way; Josh Norton has provided the Register of Deed's (ROD) office with everyone's name so that ROD can contact the property owners to obtain the right-of-way. Mr. Norton is wanting some of the $2.9-million to repair the current line, but Mayor Norton said that is not an option. Alderman Gentry asked if the County could set up [fresh water] tanks, Alderman Stancil said she feels getting water to Fairview should be a priority. She asked if having someone [from County] attend our meeting to discuss or if [the Alderman] they should attend a County meeting and discuss. Mayor Norton said the Town of Hot Springs currently doesn't have any involvement in the matter. She explained we wont have any involvement until the project is totally complete. Alderman Gentry said she thinks that Fairview waterworks could make such requests to the County; she also said McGill could possibly help getting something in place [temporarily].

Alderman Stancil told the meeting attendees that she is a member of the [American] Flood Coalition. This Coalition group is made up of elected officials from the hardest hit towns in Western North Carolina (WNC) [by the Helene Hurricane Flooding]. The Coalitions goals are to keep WNC in the news and in front of Legislators – letting everyone know what the greatest needs are. In March, the group will be meeting in Raleigh, NC [with State Legislators]; in April, the group will be going to Washington D.C. [to meet with Legislators in the U.S. Congress] to remind them that WNC has been destroyed and provide a list of things that are still needed.

Mayor Norton asked for a motion to move to Executive Session; Alderman Gentry made a motion; Alderman Stancil seconded the motion; all were in favor. Board moved to Executive Session at 7:10pm.

At 7:18pm Alderman Gentry made a motion for the Board to return from Executive Session; Alderman Myers seconded the motion. Mayor Norton let everyone know that the Board discussed, in Executive Session, two property owners who have requested to make payments on their 2024 property taxes. Mayor Norton asked for a motion to approve the first property owner who will be making $100.00 per month payments; Alderman Gentry made a motion to approve; Alderman Myers seconded the motion; all were in favor. Mayor Norton asked for a motion to deny the second request to make $250.00 per month payments; Alderman Myers made the motion to deny the request; Aldermen Gentry and Stancil seconded the motion; all were in favor.

Since there is no other business to discuss, Alderman Gentry made a motion to adjourn, Alderman Myers seconded the motion; all were in favor. Meeting adjourned at 7:20pm.

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Approved Abigail Norton

Mayor Abigail Norton

Date 3-10-2025