

Town of Hot Springs
Board of Alderman Meeting
June 9, 2025

Present:

Mayor Abigail Norton	Disaster Relief Admin Assistant (DRAA) – Sena Kassim
Alderman Jeanne Gentry	Maintenance – Jeremy Trantham
Alderman Wendy Stancil	Police Dept. – David Shelton
Alderman Dan Myers	Rebuild Hot Springs Area (RHSA) – TJ Phillips
Attorney Larry Leake	Tax Department – Laura Holloway

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

Mayor Norton referred attendees to the Public Charge that were placed on each chair. She asked everyone turn their cell phones down or off.

Mayor Norton asked the Board for a motion to approve the May 12, 2025 meeting minutes. Alderman Myers made a motion to approve; Alderman Stancil seconded the motion; all were in approval.

Mayor Norton asked the Board for a motion to approve the May 29, 2025 Special Meeting minutes. Alderman Gentry made a motion to approve; Alderman Myers seconded the motion; all were in approval.

Mayor Norton told the Board the March 2025 meeting minutes had a typographical error; the last page read that Mayor Norton introduced the new Mayor, Larry Leake. This should have read that Mayor Norton introduced the new Town Attorney, Larry Leake. Mayor Norton asked for a motion to approve the revised March minutes. Alderman Myers made a motion to approve the change; Aldermen Gentry and Stancil seconded the motion; all were in favor.

AGENDA

There was no one on the agenda for this evening.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

DEPARTMENTS

Disaster Recovery Admin Assistant – Sena Kassim

Ms. Kassim said she had a surprise volunteer group show up that day. Several things were able to be accomplished with the group. Between March 26 through current, there have been just under 1,000 volunteer hours.

Donation/Pantry Coordinator – Mandy Myers

Ms. Myers said Mother Earth Foods, who brings fresh produce is making Hot Springs the Baptist Church, on Meadow, a drop point on Saturdays. This begins on June 21, 2025. Ordering will be online. Ms. Myers said the company has local meats and vegetables. Ms. Myers said the pantry is doing well at the time.

Maintenance – Jeremy Trantham

Mr. Trantham said the sewer system is back up and running. He told the Board that there will be smoke testing throughout the Town on Tuesday, June 10. He let everyone know that if they see smoke floating around, it isn't toxic. Mr. Trantham asked that the notice also be placed on Facebook.

Mr. Trantham told the Board that most of the Maintenance Department's traffic cones were washed away in the flood. He has priced replacements from a couple of companies and would like to replace the lost cones.

The State requires Mr. Trantham to take a total chlorine test 2 times per week at the sewer plant. The department purchased a meter for the water testing, but they need a meter for the sewer testing; meters are not transferable between water testing and sewer testing.

The Maintenance team purchased a D.O. meter. They expected the probe to come with it, but that's not the case. They must order the \$1,100.00 probe separately.

Alderman Gentry told Mr. Trantham that they could go ahead and order the traffic cones through the Powell Bill. She also said that she'd look at the budget to see if the sewer chlorine tester could be ordered before July 1 [Beginning of new Fiscal Year].

Mayor Norton told the Board that a little over \$400,000.00 has made it through the final FEMA stage. The next step will go through the state. The state has been taking 30ish days to get the money out [to the municipalities]. She explained that she has paid contracts that were paid through the bridge loan. The \$400,000.00 will need to pay the bridge loan, first. There will be some left over that will go into water & sewer.

Ms. Kassim told the Board that the coming Thursday's Community Meeting will include a couple of guests; Wine to Water – If anyone is having issues with wells or water systems. UMCORE– With the United Methodist group. They will be helping residence with re-build [for damages due to flooding].

Safety – Dan Myers

Alderman Myers said the next meeting is June 26th; he will have more to discuss in the July meeting.

Tax Collector – Laura Holloway

Ms. Holloway referred the Board to the list of Legal Letters that the Attorney had sent out. She also provided the Board a list of delinquent taxpayers. Ms. Holloway told the Board that a payment plan was offered to two people. Neither person responded by the time they were to respond, so we have no new people on a payment plan.

Mayor Norton asked Mr. Holloway if there were an outstanding total of 2024 taxes due; Ms. Holloway said that 93.65% of the real taxes have been collected. The outstanding balance is currently at \$26,209.00

told the Board that the Town had collected 92.93% of Real Property taxes. Outstanding amount to collect is a little over \$29,000.00.

Ms. Holloway said she would like for the Town to look at accepting credit card payments. Alderman Stancil said she would like to see us have the ability to accept credit cards; Alderman Myers said he thinks so too. Mayor Norton said the Town set up clover for donations online. She said they [bank?] didn't have a way to differentiate [donation? Tax or water payment]. Alderman Gentry said the customer would have to pay the card fee. Several people agreed. Alderman Stancil said paying the card fee would be less than paying a late fee and people are probably use to having to pay the card fees.

Mayor Norton said she and Ms. Kassim should get together; the Mayor said she could show her the account, contacts, and Ms. Kassim could get all the information together for the Board. Alderman Stancil told the Board that [when Southern Software was here in May for training] we talked to the trainer about taking payment by credit card through the Southern Software system; this would be through a third-party. The Town would have to pay the third-party fee but wouldn't be different from having to pay Clover [credit card system]. Ms. Kassim said she would look into that, too. Mayor Norton thought the credit card system wouldn't work without the accounts receivable software within Southern Software; we do not have the accounts receivable software. Currently we only have the Tax and Utility software. Alderman Gentry told the Board that if it is determined that we would have to have the accounting software to run credit cards, the software would cost \$12,000.00 or more. This would be a one-time fee, with an annual [support] fee of \$1,000.00. Alderman Gentry brought up the question as to how the Southern Software credit card payments would work with QuickBooks. Ms. Kassim will ask these questions of Southern Software when she speaks with them. Alderman Gentry asked Ms. Kassim to also check with First Horizon on the credit card payments, too. Mayor Norton said the current card payment [for donations] is set up to go into General Funds. We would, also, have to have something set up to go into the Water & Sewer account. The Mayor asked Ms. Kassim to ask the bank the cost of two terminals.

Ms. Holloway told the Board that she has spoken to several towns in the area regarding their handling of smaller delinquent tax balances. Debt Setoff is used. Alderman Gentry told the Board that the Town has an account with Debt Setoff. Ms. Holloway explained that we don't have the necessary information to provide to Debt Setoff. Another company could provide the needed information, but their fee is around \$1,000.00 per year. Alderman Stancil asked Ms. Holloway to check into the current charges.

Police Department – David Shelton

Chief Shelton said he has a resolution for the use of a mutual agreement between Hot Springs and Marshall. He is trying to obtain agreements between the police departments. There was an escalated situation where he had to call the county for assistance. The Marshall Chief provided Chief Shelton with a copy of the agreement and asked if the Town would allow Hot Springs and Marshall enter into the agreement to help each other out. All departments are short-staffed. Chief Shelton said the Marshall Chief may have been able to get to Hot Springs sooner than the County people did during the aforementioned situation. Chief Shelton explained that if one town helps the other, there would be no pay, no reimbursement for gasoline or equipment used. Chief Shelton feels the agreement with Marshall will allow for help to get where it's needed more quickly. He will leave a copy of the agreement for the Board to review.

TOWN BUSINESS

Mayor Norton

The Mayor presented, to the Board, an application for live music from the Magnolia House; July 5th from 4:00pm until 10:00pm; and July 19th from 4:00pm until 10:00pm. Alderman Gentry made a motion to approve the application; Alderman Stancil seconded the motion; all were in favor.

Mayor Norton referred the Board to an email from Brad [Guth]. The email asked if the Board may want to change the name from Board of Alderman to Town Council. Alderman Gentry said a prior Board had addressed a name change. Mr. Guth said the Board would have to have a public hearing and change the Charter. Alderman Myers suggested to table until the July meeting. He said he has been hearing from residents that they are tired of changes.

Mayor Norton referred the Board to the memorandum for the Small Business Infrastructure Grant. She asked Mr. Guth to present. Mr. Guth told the Board that the Town is in the process of applying for a grant to replace sidewalks and drainage. A requirement is that the Board adopt a resolution stating the Board would like to have the application for the Grant submitted. A packet of information provided to each Board member includes a map showing where the sidewalks are located: both sides of Bridge Street; from Andrews to Spring Creek Bridge and on the South side of Bridge from Andrews to Hull Hill. On Andrews Avenue, from the [old] EMS building to the Red Bridge. The estimated cost for the project is just under \$1,000,000.00 and that is what the Town would be eligible for should the grant money be awarded. McGill is the engineer working on some grant requirements: engineer report for the sidewalks and drainage. Mr. Guth reported that the Town would also have to work with the small businesses along the sidewalk; we will need to provide the NCUI (North Carolina Unemployment Insurance) 101 form – showing the number of employees each business has. This information ensures that the grant money is going towards helping small businesses. Mayor Norton asked if an RFQ (request for quote) needed to be gathered; Mr. Guth advised that is not something needed at this point. Alderman Myers made a motion to apply for the grant; Alderman Gentry seconded the motion; all were in favor.

Mayor Norton asked Mr. Trantham to explain the DOT (Department of Transportation) map for the sewer line shift, due to bridge updates. Mr. Trantham explained the water and sewer lines, in Silvermine, needs to be shifted a bit. The Town's engineer has reviewed the projected changes and has approved. The new bridge work has begun. The completion date is anticipated to be September 2028.

The Mayor asked the Board if they had reviewed the Water/Sewer Ordinance. She asked if there were any changes the Board would like to make to the Ordinance. Alderman Gentry said she'd like to see the deposit increased to \$250.00. Alderman Stancil would like to see a tampering fee should also be put in place. Alderman Gentry told the Board that the Town currently has about \$8,000.00 in unpaid water bills that are over 90-days old. She explained that the Town isn't always notified when people move and they leave town without paying their water bill. Alderman Myers feels that a \$250.00 water deposit is too high. Aldermen Gentry and Stancil suggested \$200.00 and if it's later determined that is not enough deposit it can be raised again. Alderman Gentry made a motion to make the deposit \$200.00; Alderman Myers seconded the motion; all were in favor. Ms. Holloway asked if \$50.00 of the \$200.00, would go to the use of the meter. Alderman Gentry said that was correct; \$50.00 of the \$200.00 is not refundable.

Alderman Myers referred the Board to Section 6, paragraph D of the Water Ordinance. Tampering is referenced, but there is no tampering fee. The fee needs to be set. Alderman Myers asked Mr. Trantham what the cost of a meter was. Mr. Trantham responded the replacement fee was around \$130.00 for the meter only. Alderman Gentry explained that if an older meter is broken, a portion of the street has to be dug up and that takes a lot of time to repair. She said the last meter that was tampered with, and broken, cost alone for meter, fittings, and time was around \$700.00. Alderman Stancil suggested a \$500.00 tampering fee. It was decided that the tampering fee must be paid before water reconnection. Town Resident Phillip Solomon asked for clarification of tampering evidence. Mr. Trantham responded that typically the water has been turned off by the town and the person has gone to the meter, cut locks off, breaking the meter, breaking a cut off, etc. Alderman Myers also mentioned that running a water line from a neighbor's house is also tampering. Alderman Stancil made a motion for a \$500.00 tampering fee; Alderman Gentry seconded the motion; all were in favor.

Alderman Gentry asked if everyone was okay with the same deposit amount for business as we have for the residence. Alderman Myers mention that there was no additional work for the Town for a business so he's okay with keeping the business deposit the same as the resident's deposit. Alderman Stancil said she was okay with that too.

Alderman Myers referred the Board to the first page of the application; under government issued ID; first paragraph; last sentence: I agree to following conditions for receiving sewer service from the Town of Hot Springs – he wants it changed to water/sewer services. And, on the bottom of the same page: Under the bullet point I understand that each structure that requires a water/sewer hook up.....; he wants a bullet point under this to read: I understand that any commercial business is required to install and maintain an approved backflow prevention system between the facility and town water system.

Mayor Norton said she will make the changes to the Water Ordinance and application and bring them back to the Board in the July 2025 meeting.

Mayor Norton said when water and tax payments are taking; a report is not being done daily. Going forward, she wants the close out done daily. Alderman Gentry asked if a weekly report could be ran should someone need the weekly information. Ms. Holloway said she'd check to see if such report could be run. Ms. Holloway asked if no payments had been taken for taxes in a day or week, would such reports also be kept. Aldermen Gentry and Stancil said that wouldn't be necessary. Alderman Gentry said she wants a 30-60-90 report ran weekly instead of once a month or only when bills are due; she said this is imperative that the water accounts are looked at weekly.

Mayor Norton asked about Southern Software reports that Ms. Kassim was wanting to run. Ms. Kassim said she was trying to run and unread meter report. She explained that the in-house Southern Software training was really helpful, however, we had a lot re-reads due to mis-reads or typographical errors. There were also a lot of corrections in the system that needed to be made. She said that it would be nice to be able to have more training with Southern Software once everything is back on track. She explained that the system can do a lot more than how we currently use it. Lists can be run for meter readings and not have to rely on the books and would make things easier and less likely to have mis-reads. Alderman Stancil asked who would be printing the meter reading list. Alderman Gentry said Nancy Thomas would be printing the lists, however, it's good to have Ms. Kassim and Ms. Holloway to know how to run reports.

Mayor Norton told the Board that when the Accountant was checking the bank statements earlier in the day, she discovered that the bank had been taking the **annual** truck payment out of our account **monthly** since February 2025. With that, the truck is paid off, but she needs to know what the Board would like to do. Mayor Norton explained that with the bank's error we have saved around \$5,000.00 in interest but she needs to know what the Board would like to do at this point. If we go with the pay-off, she asked Attorney Leake if the Town would have to re-do the loan agreement. Mr. Leake said the result of the overcharge, by the bank, the loan has been paid. He also said we may be entitled to some interest money back. Alderman Gentry said that the money isn't in the budget, but the Town has the money, and a budget amendment can be done. Mr. Leake told the Board that if they want to keep things as is (truck paid off) the bank would owe the Town the title and some interest. Alderman Myers made a motion to pay off the truck; Alderman Gentry seconded the motion; all were in favor. Mayor Norton will contact the bank and request the title and interest.

Alderman Gentry

Alderman Gentry said the proposed budget ordinance for fiscal year 2025-2026 will be presented on June 25th at 4:00pm. The budget includes renovations to Town Hall, old EMS, and Maintenance buildings. Funds had to be appropriated from General Funds for the renovations. We are in hopes that FEMA will reimburse for the expenses at some point. She announced that the Town's tax rate will be lowered by 2¢ for the 2025 property taxes. She explained this was as low as the Town could go at this point. Currently, there is \$1.2-million dollars in the general fund. She also let the Board know that if we didn't have this money the Town would have to take out a loan for the repairs.

Alderman Gentry said that the Water/Sewer account is tight going into 2025-2026 fiscal year. The water rates will increase by \$10.00; from \$96.00 to \$106.00 resident rate and from \$116.00 to \$126.00 business rate. The overage rates will remain the same. A copy of the proposed budget will be available from now until June 25th.

Alderman Gentry a budget workshop was held with Mayor Norton, Ms. Kassim, the accountant, and herself. Alderman Gentry said they tried very hard to maintain the budget. Alderman Myers said that a few areas increased ... such as the Fire Department. Alderman Gentry explained that people may hear that other municipalities and counties have cut their budget due to the hurricane. She asked all to please know they have maintained and increased as they could. Alderman Stancil asked those attending the meeting that if they hear anyone complain about the water rate increase, to remind them that water is a business within the Town business. Property tax money does not take care of the water & sewer matters; water has to take care of itself as it is an enterprise fund. Alderman Stancil explained

the hurricane caused a lot of damage to the water/sewer system and repairing the damage is why the water budget took such a huge hit. Alderman Gentry explained that the water increase is \$1.25 per week.

Alderman Stancil

Alderman Stancil said she met with the Flood Coalition. The budgets were talked about regarding state and federal level. She received more grant information; she will provide this information to Mr. Guth and Mr. Phillips.

The Board will go into Executive Session to discuss contracts. Alderman Gentry made a motion to move into Executive Session at 7:18pm; Alderman Myers seconded the motion; all were in favor.

The Board returned from Executive Session at 8:49pm. During Executive session, Alderman Myers needed to leave at 7:40 to return to work.

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 8:50pm.

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Approved
Abigail Norton
Mayor Abigail Norton

7-14-25
Date