

Town of Hot Springs
Board of Alderman Meeting
June 8, 2026

Present:

Mayor Abigail Norton
Alderman Lisa Gahagan
Alderman Tammy Shelton
Alderman Wendy Stancil
Attorney Larry Leake
Town Administrator/Finance Officer --
Sena Kassim

Accountant – Sidney Mashburn
Entertainment Committee –
Wendy Stancil
Fire – Josh Norton
Maintenance – Jeremy Trantham
Planning & Zoning – Tim Arnette

Rebuild Hot Springs Area (RHSA) –
T.J. Phillips
Tax Collector – Laura Holloway

Mayor Norton called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., reminded attendees to follow the Public Charge, and requested cell phones be silenced and conversations kept to a minimum.

The May 2026 meeting minutes need some corrections and will be available at next meeting.

AGENDA

Glenda Dolbeare

Ms. Dolbeare addressed the Board about the condemned former Bluff Mountain Outfitters building at 148 Bridge Street and other condemned properties owned by the same out-of-town owner. She expressed concern that the issue has not been resolved and noted the possible hazard of the building's awning.

She brought the matter directly to the aldermen because of their policy, ordinance, and budget responsibilities. Mayor Norton stated that Attorney Leake has sent letters to the owners, who are still within their response period, and advised that the Town cannot remove anything from the condemned properties under legal guidance.

Ms. Dolbeare also questioned whether a parking lot was Town-owned. Mayor Norton said Google Earth images from before September 27, 2024, were used to verify the street location, and any parking lines mistakenly painted on private property will be removed and repainted on Town property. She noted the Town owns the parking spaces and that Hurricane Helene damaged the prior markings.

Alderman Stancil said the County Inspector's letter should have included a deadline and consequences for inaction. Mayor Norton noted that Attorney Leake also sent a letter, and Alderman Stancil requested a copy. She added that property owners are responsible if their property injures someone on the sidewalk.

Tim Arnette – Owner of the Spring Creek Tavern

Spring Creek Tavern requested a Noise Ordinance extension until 12:00 a.m. on Saturday, July 4. Alderman Gahagan moved to approve; Aldermen Shelton and Stancil seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

DEPARTMENTS

Town Administrator – Sena Kassim

Introduced Brian White of Land of Sky to discuss its Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) related work.

Mr. White, regional project manager with the Land of Sky Regional Council, explained that the Council helps counties and towns secure and manage federal and state grant funding, including FEMA, NC Commerce, and HUD programs for hurricane recovery. He said Land of Sky is working with the Town on Community Development Block Grant funding for commercial district revitalization, with several potential projects identified in Hot Springs.

Potential projects include jailhouse space revitalization, second-floor Town Hall improvements for commercial or office use, and a future resilience hub at the volunteer fire department. Mr. White said the community infrastructure application is expected to open in July, and the commercial district revitalization application is expected by early August. Public notices are being prepared, and further project details will be discussed at upcoming meetings.

Ms. Kassim reported that after the bridge is removed, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) will retain ownership of the property, and the Town may apply for an encroachment agreement. She met with the spa about neighbor-related concerns, including liability, which were shared with Jack Henderson at MountainTrue. Mr. Henderson provided a map showing possible river access and a small parking area. Further legal advice and Board approval will be needed, but the item was informational. Alderman Gahagan asked whether the Board should send a letter to NCDOT, and Ms. Kassim said the letter should come from the Board, with Mountain True assisting on easement and encroachment matters.

In the next small business grant cycle, The Town is seeking funding for historic lighting on Bridge Street and Andrews Avenue. Land of Sky is assisting the Town with grant applications and would serve as grant administrator. The Town hopes the funding will also support flood-damaged sidewalk repairs on South Spring Street.

Alderman Gahagan requested that residents be notified when sidewalk repairs are scheduled. Ms. Kassim agreed and explained that NCDOT is coordinating with the Town. Once the Town receives more information about NCDOT's schedule, residents can be updated so they understand the timing of the repairs.

Ms. Kassim informed attendees that the Community Center and Jailhouse surveys and design materials are available on Rebuild's website. She asked the Board to review the materials and

provide feedback. Julie Judkins with Appalachian Design Center (ADC) also sent an email to the Town Board requesting feedback.

Land of Sky is scheduling the official CDBG-Disaster Relief (DR) public hearing during the July 13 Board of Alderman meeting, where community feedback may be provided. ADC will prepare a second design version using the prior designs and public input, then send it to the engineering firm for cost estimates and required code information. The engineering work is funded through Land of Sky and Southwestern Commission grants.

The Economic Development Association (EDA) requested a letter of support from the Board for an EDA grant application. If awarded, the funding would support a three-year process for project design and engineering. A team, with community input, would review several potential projects and select the one that would provide the greatest benefit to the Town. Previous discussions had focused on the wastewater treatment plant site, but the final project would be determined through the review process. Alderman Gahagan made a motion to approve the EDA letter of support. Alderman Stancil seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

The Town was awarded a \$128,000 USDA grant for contents lost due to Hurricane Helene flooding at the Police Department, Public Works, and Town Hall. To complete the grant process, the Board needs to accept the award. Mayor Norton will prepare a resolution, sign the required documents, and return them to USDA. Funds are typically received within a few weeks. Alderman Gahagan made a motion to accept the USDA grant. Alderman Stancil seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

During review of the Budget Worksheet, it was determined that debt service needed to be increased to account for two additional Fire Department vehicles and one additional Police Department vehicle, bringing the Town's total to four loans. An additional \$12,000 will be added for debt service, which will change the appropriated fund balance. The corrections and budget ordinance will be available for public review for the next two weeks. A meeting was scheduled for June 25, 2026, to approve the 2026–2027 budget.

Ms. Kassim will contact Duke Energy to request electric plugs on the poles so the Town's Christmas decorations can be lit. Ms. Phillips noted that the proposed historic streetlights include plug-ins for Christmas lights, which may provide an alternative to adding power to the poles.

The Town needs 12 inflow shields for manhole covers at a cost of \$250 each. The shields would help keep rainwater and other materials out of the manholes. Ms. Kassim said she hopes the shields can be paid for through the small business grant. These items are not included in the 2026–2027 budget.

Entertainment Committee – Wendy Stancil

The Committee will host the Fourth of July celebration at the school. Food and drinks will be sold, and children's activities will include a bounce house, water-gun zone, above-ground pool for older children, and splash pad. The event will begin at 4:00 p.m. Water activities will run until 7:00 p.m., and food will be sold until 8:30 p.m.

Volunteer Fire Department – Josh Norton

Chief Norton asked Mr. Phillips to discuss the proposed Resilience Hub. Mr. Phillips provided the Board with a copy of a draft scope of work. The new structure would replace an existing structure at the Fire Department and would serve a dual purpose: supporting Fire Department operations and functioning as a resilience hub during community emergencies.

Mr. Phillips said the project is in the early stages and requested Board approval to begin working with the ADC. Attorney Leake advised that a vote was not required for this matter. Mr. Phillips will proceed with getting the project started.

Chief Norton said the plant gave the Town permission to launch fireworks from the lower end of its property; however, he was concerned that not everyone would be able to view the display from that location. Weather permitting, the plan is to launch fireworks from the water tank again this year. The Town may consider using the recently purchased River Road property for future fireworks events.

Chief Norton said he would email Attorney Leake regarding the substation at Firefly. The Town does not own the land where the substation is located, and Chief Norton asked what steps would be needed. Attorney Leake explained that Firefly would need to commit the property to the Town. If this matter is addressed at the association's annual September meeting, two-thirds of the entire Homeowners' Association—not merely two-thirds of those present—would need to vote in favor of transferring the land to the Town of Hot Springs.

Rebuild Hot Springs – T.J. Phillips

Mr. Phillips clarified that he was speaking as a community member, not on behalf of Rebuild Hot Springs. He asked the Board to formally recognize September 27 as Preparedness Day, a day of observance for the community to gather, reflect on lessons learned, and take practical steps to prepare for future emergencies. The observance could serve as an annual reminder to review supplies, check generators and oil, and consider how individuals and the community can be better prepared for future crises. Mr. Phillips presented a resolution for the Board to consider adopting September 27 as Preparedness Day. Mayor Norton asked for a motion to consider the resolution. Alderman Stancil made the motion, Alderman Gahagan seconded it, and all were in favor.

Tax Department – Laura Holloway

Ms. Holloway reported that the Town has collected 99.1% of the 2025 real property taxes to date. Currently, there is only \$2,863.38 owed on 2025 real property taxes with 6 property owners who owe \$500 or more in delinquent taxes. Ms. Holloway said she has referred the 6 accounts to legal for demand letters. Hopefully, by the end of the month, the collection rate will be higher.

Website Administrator – Kevin Reese

Mr. Reese reported that the Town's website and Rebuild Hot Springs' website include the conceptual drawings for the Community Center and Old Jailhouse that were presented at an open meeting several weeks ago. The ADC is still accepting feedback. Mr. Reese encouraged anyone who was unable to attend the meeting to review the drawings online and provide comments.

TOWN BUSINESS

Mayor Norton

Mayor Norton reported that, while reading meters, it was discovered that some customers who had requested their water meters be turned off had been turning the meters back on, using water, and then turning them off again. Mayor Norton requested Board approval to draft a letter to customers whose meters have been turned off but who are using water. A draft letter will be prepared and brought to the next meeting for Board review and approval.

Alderman Wendy Stancil

Alderman Stancil reported that the Board has been discussing the lack of cell service since T-Mobile took over UScellular. Mayor Norton has met with T-Mobile to discuss the issue. The Board agreed that the best next step would be to ask the County Commissioners to sign a letter to T-Mobile. Alderman Stancil said she spoke with Commissioner Wechtel, and the Commissioners are willing to sign a letter. Alderman Stancil drafted both the Commissioners' letter and a supporting letter to attach. One of the main concerns emphasized in the letters is the lack of reliable access to emergency services.

Alderman Stancil proposed placing a conservation easement on part of the recently purchased River Road property. She said this could help the Town preserve the property long term and maintain it as a public space for the community. If the Board is interested, she is willing to research the steps required. She also noted that several groups may be willing to partner with the Town to create and maintain a natural conservation area on the property.

Alderman Stancil reported that she was asked to speak about Hurricane Helene and the Town's microgrid at a Land of Sky fundraiser sponsored by the North Carolina Sustainable Energy Association and Duke Energy. The purpose of the event is to understand how the microgrid performed and what improvements could be made. The following day, she will participate in a roundtable with members of the General Assembly to discuss the Town's microgrid experience. Both events will take place in Mills River. Alderman Stancil explained that making two round trips to Mills River would cost the Town \$281.00 in mileage. Staying overnight in Mills River, including mileage, would cost \$213.00. The rest of the Board agreed that Alderman Stancil should stay in Mills River rather than drive back and forth. The expense will be paid from the Continuing Education line item.

Alderman Gahagan

Alderman Gahagan thanked the Board for its work on the River Road land purchase event. The Franklin family, from whom the land was purchased, attended the event. Alderman Gahagan also thanked everyone who worked behind the scenes and reflected on how far the Town has come over the past year through the efforts of many people.

At 7:19 p.m., Alderman Stancil moved to enter Executive Session; Alderman Shelton seconded; motion carried unanimously.

At 8:25 p.m., Mayor Norton asked for a motion to return to regular session. Alderwoman Gahagan made the motion, Alderwoman Shelton seconded it, and all were in favor.

During closed session the Board discussed personnel and legal matters.

Mayor Norton asked for a motion to change Acting Chief Workman to a salaried position and pay the same rate as Chief Shelton's salary for the duration of her appointment as Acting Chief. Alderwoman Shelton made the motion to approve, Alderwoman Stancil seconded it, and all were in favor.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:26 p.m. on a motion by Alderman Gahagan, seconded by Alderman Shelton; all in favor.

all
Approved

7-13-2024
Date

Abigail Norton
Mayor Abigail Norton