Town of Washington Park

Municipal Building

February 3, 2025, 7:00 p.m.

United Bank General Fund $ 482,292.88

United Bank Capital Reserve Fund/Truck Account 82,100.00

United Bank Capital Reserve CD 81,290.44

United Bank Powell Bill Checking 56,411.92

United Bank Powell Bill/Saving CD 10,743.80

United Bank American Rescue Plan Account 98,118.63

Total $ 810,957.67

Present: Thomas Richter, Mayor; Jeff Peacock, Mayor pro tem; Lee Bowen, Commissioner; Belinda Cowell, Commissioner; Wade Dale, Commissioner, Vail Rumley, Commissioner.

Mayor Richter called the meeting to order. Commissioner Dale made a motion to approve the agenda. Seconded by Commissioner Bowen. Passed by all.

Public Input:

Derek Cooper presented an update from the Townscape Committee. Their plans for the Municipal Building include removing the current shrubs around the building and replacing them with holly bushes and gardenias; they would not remove the river birch trees. They would also like to add a solar light for the flagpole. They asked for approval to proceed with removing the bushes to prepare for planting in the spring. Stuart Dudley quoted $550 to remove the bushes, or the Board can consider having staff perform the work.

The Committee has also noticed water standing around the building; possible considerations included installing a swale on one side of the building to help move water away, adding gutters to the building, or installing a gravel bed around the building. As the walkway gets covered by water, consider widening the walkway with pavers on either side, and make it ADA compliant. Discussion on grade of property; raising sidewalk; benefit of gutters.

The Board said they would like to see a rendering of the plans and an estimated budget before removing any current bushes. Mr. Cooper said a rough estimate for replacing the shrubs would be $1,100 for new plants, mulch, and topsoil; that does not include cost for any grading work that may be needed, or any of the other projects.

Previously, the Board authorized removing the Cherry trees along Isabella because they were going to grow too tall for the electric lines; the Town would need to work on drainage issues before replanting. The Committee would like to proceed with phase 1, replanting trees from Walnut to Beech; once the Town has a better idea of drainage improvements at the far west end of Isabella, replant phase 2, Beech to Edgewater.

January Minutes and Financial Report: The January financial report and minutes were reviewed. Commissioner Bowen made a motion to approve the financial report. Seconded by Commissioner Cowell. Passed by all. Mayor pro tem Peacock made a motion to approve the January minutes. Seconded by Commissioner Rumley. Passed by all.

Old Business

Drainage North side of Isabella Ave East end: No report.

320 Isabella Avenue: The clerk received an update email from the homeowner - the shed in the back right of the yard was demolished today; they are working to restore the front door and hope to have it installed and remove the plywood in the next few weeks; continue to get estimates on interior work. No build out timeline provided at this time.

Resilient Coastal Communities Program grant projects:

Phase 3 – Engineering/Design of Living Shoreline Grant Project Ordinance

Mayor Richter, Mayor pro tem Peacock, Commissioner Cowell, and Clerk Alligood met with RK&K representatives and Jamie Heath (MEC) on January 30; walked entire length of shoreline, noting current points used for access/recreation. RK&K obtained drone photos of the shoreline and plan to conduct a survey next week. This is a reimbursable grant – costs are paid up front then get reimbursed. While advances instead of reimbursements is not an option, reimbursement requests can be filed monthly instead of bi-monthly. The Town received the first invoice from the Mid East Commission for admin work performed to date, in the amount of $2,465. This invoice was paid, and has been submitted for reimbursement.

Clerk Alligood presented an Ordinance to Establish a Grant Project Fund for the RCCP Phase 3 Living Shoreline Project. Mayor pro tem Peacock made a motion to approve the Grant Project Ordinance. Commissioner Bowen seconded. Passed by all.

Closing America’s Wastewater Access Gap (CAWAG) – Wastewater Analysis:

Notice was received Friday that the contractor for this grant received a stop work order; for now, work on this grant is on hold.

Building Resilient Infrastructure in Communities (BRIC) Stormwater Action Plan:

The timeline has been adjusted again; right now, notification for eligibility to apply will be provided around February 5, with the application due February 21. The next notification will be in March and the final application currently due April 9. These dates are subject to change, provided the application process is not impacted by current events in Washington DC. If awarded, this grant is also a reimbursable grant. The total request is $393,750 with a 25% local match (approx. $98,500).

The mayor asked about the NC Forest Service tree survey grant the Townscape Committee is pursuing; it was reported they have not received any update at this time.

320 River Road: On January 14, US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) representative, Shane Staples, met with homeowners Richard and Janet Cooper, and resident Derek Cooper; also present, Mayor Richter, Commissioner Lee Bowen, and Clerk April Alligood. Per Mr. Staples, the USACE does not regulate noxious growth; their main concern is with bringing in or moving dirt. As far as the USACE is concerned, any growth, plants can be cleared in the yard. From a biological standpoint, keeping some of the trees and plants would be beneficial, but the resident is not prohibited from removing them.

Commissioner Bowen read the current ordinance related to noxious growth, §93.027 (copy attached). His recommendation is for all undergrowth (wheat straw, grass, etc.) to be trimmed to 12”, leaving the trees alone.

Resident Derek Cooper was present and stated he did not think the Town should require growth in wetlands to be cut; doing so will require continual maintenance. He is trying to get the trees to grow so the underbrush will not continue to grow. When he moved, there was an understanding with the Town and he put up a fence delineating the line for maintenance; historically, enforcement excluded wetlands. He stated he has done what the Town has asked of him.

Discussion transitioned to changing the ordinance to establish a historical riparian buffer line of 20 or 30 feet from designated wetlands. The current ordinance addresses overgrown lawns; it does not fit with wetlands. It would be up to the homeowner to get the buffer area established. As the Mid East Commission is currently working on revising the Town’s ordinances, the Board suggested reaching out to them for suggested language to revise this section to incorporate a buffer line delineation. Mayor pro tem Peacock started to make a motion to amend the noxious growth ordinance to add a buffer line; however, he withdrew the motion so the clerk could follow-up with the Town Attorney on procedural steps to revise this section of the ordinances. Further enforcement of the current ordinance was tabled for now.

602 Small Street: Clerk Alligood reached out to Attorney Sasnett on the best way to proceed if the Town needs to have an outside contractor assist in bringing the yard into compliance. Attorney Sasnett requested historical data/documents; this information was gathered and provided to her for review. The clerk also provided a brief background on the NC Local Government Debt Setoff Clearinghouse: the Town is an active participant; any submitted debt must be greater than $50 and at least 60 days delinquent; the Town must conduct due process; debt can then be submitted to Clearinghouse. There is no additional cost for service – a $15 fee is added to each debt. For now, wait and see what the attorney suggests as next steps.

New Business

Waiver of Conflict Statement – Attorney Sasnett

Continue to next month

Commissioners’ Reports

Commissioner Dale: nothing to report; tennis court work on hold pending suitable weather.

Commissioner Rumley: Multiple crimes reported on January 6 and one report of a suspicious person on January 11. A pistol was reported found at the boat marina; appears to be linked to the same person that EMS responded to last month. Discussion regarding Bright speed employees not wearing identifiable clothing when approaching homes; suggested a letter be sent to the company.

Mayor pro tem Peacock: Reported one resident sold home and is living in a converted garage until an addition or tiny house is built on relative’s property. Brief discussion regarding ADUs; septic system needs to be able to support the additional living space. Current ordinance does not indicate a minimum size for dwellings.

Commissioner Bowen: Bren Whitford reached out about her yard flooding. Cleaned out section of backyard neighbor’s ditch which provided some relief, but not complete. Her yard gets water from tennis court, street, and other neighbor’s raised property; suggest evaluating property to make the temporary ditch in backyard larger. Commissioner Bowen made a motion to ask Stuart Dudley to evaluate the property to see if there is enough fall to enlarge the ditch. Mayor pro tem Peacock seconded the motion. Passed by all.

Commissioner Cowell: Followed up with owner of 505 Fairview regarding Park tree and possible interference with septic system. The tree is not dead, dying, or dangerous; not a situation where the Town would take the tree down. Relayed it is possible the Board would approve removal, but it would be at the owner’s expense. Also noted some trees in that row have split trunks; will be something to keep an eye on.

Also met with owners at 101 Edgewater. They have plans to put in a concrete driveway and one tree is in the way; since it is not a Park tree, they can remove it if they want. There is one Park tree with branches that need to be removed; they can proceed with removing the effected branches.

Clerk’s Report: Deposits received in January totaled $42,105.03 (Ad Valorem / NCVTS $28,088.20; local option sales tax: $14,016.83). Guys worked on fixing cylinder in truck $522. Paid flood insurance renewal $1,269. Received recreation funding request from Beaufort County; submit request for $5,000. Town credit card – Corporate Authorization Resolution required with credit card application; card limit $10,000, transaction limit $2,500. Mayor pro tem Peacock made a motion to approve and sign the Resolution. Seconded by Commissioner Bowen. Passed by all. Town picnic – previously mentioned possibly scheduling in April or May; no further discussion.

Commissioner Bowen made a motion to go into closed session. Seconded by Commissioner Dale. Approved by all.

Commissioner Bowen made a motion to return to open session. Seconded by Commissioner Dale. Approved by all.

Nicolas Villeda will complete his 6-month probationary period February 12, 2025. Commissioner Bowen made a motion to give him a $1/hour raise, effective next week. Seconded by Mayor pro tem Peacock. Passed by all.

The next regular meeting will be Monday, March 3, 2025, at 7:00 pm at the Municipal Building. There being no further business, the mayor adjourned the meeting.

April S. Alligood, Clerk

Town of Washington Park