



**TOWN OF WENTWORTH
MINUTES
OF
THE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
WENTWORTH, NORTH CAROLINA
March 5, 2024
7:00 p.m.**

The regular monthly meeting of the Wentworth Town Council was held on Tuesday, March 5th, 2024 at the Wentworth Town Hall at 7:00 p.m.

Council Members Present: Mayor Dennis Paschal Jr., Mayor Pro Tem Evelyn Conner, Daryl Crowder, Cheryl Moore, Dennis Paschal III

Council Members Absent:
A quorum was met.

Staff Present: Yvonne Russell, Town Clerk/ Finance Officer
Hunter Wilson, Accounting Clerk/ Deputy Clerk

Others Present: Ellis Martin, Attorney - Town of Wentworth
Trevor Gardner, CPA – Rouse, Rouse, Rouse & Gardner
Jennifer Brown – Rockingham Co. Sheriff’s Office
Diane Sawyer, Softball Commissioner - Wentworth PTA Ball Program
Neil Jacques, Chairman – Rockingham County Food Coalition
C.J. Idol, Executive Director – MARC

Article I. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Dennis Paschal Jr. called the meeting to order.

Article II. INVOCATION

Councilmember Dennis Paschal III gave the invocation.

Article III. APPROVAL OF TOWN COUNCIL AGENDA

A. Requests and Petitions of Citizens

There were no Requests or Petitions of Citizens.

B. Approve/Amend Agenda

Mayor Paschal made a **MOTION**, *“To approve the agenda as written.”*

Mayor Pro Tem Evelyn Conner seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion carried.

Article IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Town Council Meeting

1. February 6, 2024

Mayor Pro Tem Conner made a **MOTION**, *“The minutes stand approved as written.”*

Councilmember Daryl Crowder seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion carried.

Article V. OLD BUSINESS

There was no Old Business.

Article VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Audit Report for Fiscal Year End 6/30/2023 by: Trevor Gardner, CPA – Rouse, Rouse, Rouse & Gardner

Mayor Paschal introduced Mrs. Rouse and asked if she would like to speak.

Mrs. Rouse expressed her gratitude, saying, "I would like to thank each of you for the long association you had with my husband. I think he loved his job. He loved working with the Council and he certainly loved working with the Town of Wentworth. You have a good report tonight, and Trevor will do a good job presenting it. Thank you very much."

Mayor Paschal stated that the Town of Wentworth enjoyed working with Mr. Rouse. Mayor Paschal introduced **Trevor Gardner** to present the Audit Report for the year ending June 30th, 2023.

Mr. Gardner started by explaining the difference between the General Audit and the Yellow Book Audit, which are the two audits required for the Town of Wentworth for the 2022-2023 fiscal year. He mentioned that the Town of Wentworth has a very healthy fund balance of \$3,278,067 and that there were no budgetary violations to report. **Mr. Gardner** pointed out one internal control deficiency that has been observed in previous years, which is the small size of the finance staff. He explained that it is common for small municipalities with few employees to have little segregation of duties.

Lastly, **Mr. Gardner** said the Town of Wentworth staff is great to work with and spoke on behalf of Rex Rouse, saying, "...Rex thought very highly of the Town of Wentworth, the Council, and of Yvonne and staff..." Mr. Gardner thanked the Council.

(Note: The audit is available for inspection in the Town Clerk's Office.)

Article VI. NEW BUSINESS

B. Funding Requests for Fiscal Year 2024-2025:

1. Rockingham County Sheriff's Office: \$2,869.00

Captain Jennifer Brown presented a funding request from the Rockingham County Sheriff's Office, requesting \$2,869.00. She explained that the requested amount of money will be used to purchase ballistic shields for the patrol division, to be used in cases of active shooter situations, domestic incidents, and other similar scenarios. She also expressed gratitude on behalf of the Rockingham County Sheriff's Office for the funds provided in the past.

2. RCHS SADD Club: \$2,500.00

There was no one present to speak on behalf of the RCHS SADD Club.

Town Clerk, Yvonne Russell said, "...The last time they sent in a funding request was in 2020, but they never collected a check because there was no prom due to COVID-19. The last funds they received was in 2019. I had two ladies from the high school come by the Town Hall, and they had intentions of starting the Prom Promise Breakfast again."

Councilmember Paschal asked, "For next year, or this year?"

Town Clerk Russell clarified that it would be for next year's prom.

3. Rockingham County Middle School Band: \$8,752.22

No one was present to speak on behalf of the Rockingham County Middle School Band.

Town Clerk Russell told the Council that the request is for one bass clarinet, one tuba, and one tenor saxophone, as it shows in the funding request form.

4. Wentworth PTA Ball Program: \$18,000.00

Diane Sawyer, the Softball Commissioner, spoke on behalf of the Wentworth PTA Ball Program. She mentioned that the program had a record-breaking enrollment of 400 kids in the spring of last year and has seen growth for both fall and spring sports. She explained that the funding request is for providing all players with sublimated jerseys, which will cost \$12,000.00, and for erecting an LED marquee.

Councilmember Paschal asked where they intended to put the digital marquee.

Ms. Sawyer mentioned that she wasn't completely certain about the plans for the digital marquee, but she indicated that Justin, the Baseball Commissioner, intended to share it with the schools. "They want it to face the road, either from the back side of the softball field or from the side of it," **Ms. Sawyer** said.

Mayor Pro Tem Conner asked about the age brackets for the program.

Ms. Sawyer explained that in baseball, there are age groups ranging from 4 to 12 years, with a total of 17 teams. In softball, there are 9 teams with players aged between 6 and 14. She mentioned that they play against teams from Stokesdale, Huntsville, Bethany, Eden, and Madison/Mayodan. **Ms. Sawyer** also noted that their site is the largest in the league.

Councilmember Paschal asked for an estimated cost for the digital marquee.

Ms. Sawyer was unsure of the estimated price for the digital marquee, but **Town Clerk Russell** mentioned that the cost for the Town Hall digital marquee, which is two-sided with a brick base, was approximately \$16,000.

Ms. Sawyer mentioned that Justin spoke with Graphic Solutions, but she was not involved in that conversation. She also mentioned that they were able to install the lights over the fields and that there will be a ribbon-cutting event to which the Council is invited. The date for the event is yet to be announced.

Mayor Paschal asked, "...When we get the gym finished at the old Wentworth School building, do you think some of the kids will gravitate towards basketball?"

Ms. Sawyer said, "We do and we are very hopeful. Justin has a whole plan for you all that he'd like to talk about. He'd like to see a part-time staff person hired to be over the ball program and basketball program..."

There was no more discussion.

5. Project SAFE: \$782.25

There was no one present to speak on behalf of the Project SAFE funding request.

Town Clerk Russell explained that it is a recurring funding request from previous fiscal years.

6. LOT 2540, Inc. (formerly Rockingham United mobile market): \$6,000.00

There was no one present to speak on behalf of the LOT 2540 funding request.

Mayor Paschal said, "They are losing their place in Madison, so they are having to move around between two to three different buildings."

7. Countywide Food Drive – Rockingham County Food Coalition: \$1,000.00

Neil Jacques spoke on behalf of the Countywide Food Drive. He mentioned that last year the coalition collected between \$56,000 and \$57,000 worth of food, and this year their goal is \$60,000. He pointed out a brochure listing the 8 charities in the county supported by the coalition. **Mr. Jacques** explained the challenges of collecting food for the food drive, such as the inflation of grocery items, which has made it difficult for people to donate as much as usual due to the increased prices of groceries. **Mr. Jacques** also shared an inspiring story: “The Fire Marshall, Melissa Joyce, was moved by the lack of food on the shelves for veterans at the Veterans’ Food Pantry and decided to donate food from her own pantry. She then challenged her office to support this cause, which resulted in a significant improvement. The Wentworth Fire Station collected over 400 pounds of food by reaching out to the community for support.”

Mayor Paschal asked where the Veterans’ Food Pantry was located.

Mr. Jacques explained that the Veterans’ Pantry is located on Cherokee Camp Rd. He thanked the Council, and there was no further discussion.

8. Museum & Archives of Rockingham County (MARC): \$10,000.00

C.J. Idol, the Executive Director, spoke on behalf of the MARC funding request. He highlighted some significant points from 2023, stating, "The museum had over 1,300 visitors in 2023, despite not operating at full capacity... We welcomed 5 new board members and a new president... Additionally, we installed a Civil Rights trail marker." **Mr. Idol** also discussed the possibility of a grand reopening once the HVAC system is fixed, enabling the museum to operate normally.

Mr. Idol thanked the Council for their time.

9. Fine Arts Festival Association of Rockingham County: \$2,800.00

No one was present to speak on behalf of the Fine Arts Festival Association of Rockingham County.

10. Help, Inc.: \$10,000.00

There was no one present to speak on behalf of Help, Inc.

11. Arts Council of Rockingham County: \$8,500.00

No one was present to speak on behalf of the Arts Council of Rockingham County.

Town Clerk Russell said that this is the same requested amount as last fiscal year.

12. RCHS Football: \$5,000.00

Town Clerk Russell announced, "This request has been submitted by a student at Rockingham County High School. He is working on his senior project, focusing on safety equipment for the football team. Although he has submitted his request, he does not have all the necessary information ready yet. He has asked if he could present at the April Town Council meeting, as he prefers to have all the information ready before presenting. The funding request is for guardian caps, which are protective shells designed to be worn underneath the football team's helmets."

The Town Council agreed to allow the applicant to present his funding request at the April meeting.

13. Redirections: \$2,458.00

No one came to present on behalf of the Redirections funding request.

Town Clerk Russell mentioned that this funding request is the same as last fiscal year's.

Article VI. NEW BUSINESS

B. Discussion of Park Suggestions (Additional Trees and Playground Equipment)

Town Clerk Russell mentioned that park suggestions were submitted to us: one through the Town of Wentworth website and another via Facebook Messenger.

Mayor Paschal said Town Clerk Russell discussed adding steps to the current playset with Jack Huffman from Site Conceptions. Huffman suggested that while steps could be added, the playset is only rated for ages 5 to 12. He cautioned against allowing toddlers to use the set independently due to safety concerns.

Attorney Ellis Martin said there isn't an issue for greater risk to the town if steps were to be added, as long as the equipment is installed correctly.

Mayor Paschal added that it comes down to whether or not we want a child to be able to access the set without having help from a guardian.

Town Clerk Russell mentioned that there is a sign stating the rating of the playset as well as safety precautions.

Mayor Paschal showed the Council some pictures he took at Freedom Park in Eden. The pictures show a set of steps on their playset. He said, "A three-year-old could climb up this set of steps, but I am just worried about them getting hurt. We would have to replace the entry onto the set if we wanted to add in the steps." He suggested that the Council check out the playground before the April meeting to understand where the steps would go.

Mayor Paschal explained the other suggestion, which was to add more trees around the recently installed swing benches. The swing bench closest to the sidewalk near the playground is the only one that does not have trees around it. There is a camera on a pole that faces the playground, and if a tree were to be beside that bench swing to provide shade, it would eventually block the view of the camera as it grows. He spoke to Jeff Johnson, Architect, who mentioned that Birch trees and Crepe Myrtles need to be 8 to 10 feet away from sidewalks. "I think we could let the trees we have planted grow for a while and then reassess," **Mayor Paschal** said.

The potential idea of adding more trees around the open areas of park was also discussed.

Councilmember Paschal mentioned the advantage of leaving the open area clear of trees due to adding a new shelter, etc.

Mayor Paschal agreed and said that it is the only open area the park has.

There was no further discussion.

Article VII. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

Article VIII. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mayor Paschal gave the following announcements:

- The next regular meeting of the **Wentworth Planning Board** is scheduled for **Tuesday, March 19, 2024 at 7:00 pm** at the Wentworth Town Hall.
- The next regular meeting of the **Wentworth Town Council** is scheduled for **Tuesday, April 2, 2024, at 7:00 pm** at the Wentworth Town Hall.
- **Daylight Savings Time** begins **Sunday, March 10, 2024.**
- The **Wentworth Town Hall** will be closed **Friday, March 29, 2024**, in observance of **Good Friday. Easter** is on **Sunday, March 31, 2024.**

Article IX. BUDGET WORK SESSION

Mayor Paschal made a **MOTION**, "*We move into the Budget Work Session: FY 2024-2025.*"

Mayor Pro Tem Conner seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion carried.

1. Consideration of Updated Sheriff's Office Contract

Mayor Paschal made a **MOTION**, "*to approve the updated Sheriff's Office Contract for fiscal year 2024-2025.*"

Mayor Pro Tem Conner seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion carried.

2. Discussion of Funding Requests

Councilmember Paschal expressed the need for additional time to review the funding requests, as there are new ones to consider this year.

Council agreed to put this off until the April 2nd meeting.

3. Annual Budget Estimates

Council decided to hold this off until the April 2nd meeting.

Town Clerk Russell inquired about any budget-related items to include in the next budget work session, such as new boardroom chairs.

Councilmember Paschal inquired if it needed to be included in the budget work session. **Town Clerk Russell** confirmed that it would, as the total cost would exceed \$1,500.

Councilmember Paschal inquired whether the chairs would need to wait until the new fiscal year. **Town Clerk Russell** responded that a budget amendment could be made instead.

Mayor Paschal mentioned increasing the Town’s Financial Cash Management Policy. Specifically, in line 14 of the policy, it states, “Expenditures for specific items costing more than \$1,500.00 per each item should have Town Council concurrence unless already specifically authorized by budget appropriations.” He suggested raising it to \$5,000.00.

There was no further discussion.

Article X. ADJOURN

Mayor Paschal made a **MOTION**, “*To adjourn.*”

Mayor Pro Tem Conner and **Councilmember Crowder** seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted by: _____
Hunter Wilson,
Deputy Clerk & Accounting Clerk

Approved by: _____
Robert Dennis Paschal, Jr., Mayor