

## **May 22, 2025**

At the Regular Called Meeting of the Mayor and Board of Aldermen/women of the Town of Canton held at the Town Hall at 85 Summer Street, May 22, 2025, at 6:00pm with Mayor Smathers, and Aldermen/women Mull, Hamlett, Shepard, and Proctor present. The following proceedings were held.

### **A. Call to Order**

Mayor Smathers called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

### **B. Roll Call**

Mayor Smathers stated that Manager Stinnett, Assistant Manager Walker, Clerk Dunbar, and Town Attorney Morgan were present.

### **C. Pledge/Invocation**

Ed Underwood led the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **D. Approval of Minutes:**

No Minutes to approve

### **E. Mayor Comments**

Talked with Eric Spirtas about the 18 wheelers lining up Champion Drive going into the landfill. Mayor Smathers stated that Mr. Spirtas has been to people's houses and to talk with property owners about this issue. Mayor Smathers stated that this should not be a long process.

Mayor Smathers praised everyone that has been working on Rhoda Street. Mayor Smathers stated the plan is to open Rhoda Street at the end of June, supportive Hyatt Pipeline.

Mayor Smathers stated that Mtn Bizworks had a grant cycle that business could received up to \$25,000. Several businesses in Canton got these grants.

### **F. Aldermen/women Comments**

Aldерwoman Mull said she went to Mama Ts Summer Celebration this past Saturday. Aldерwoman Mull stated it was great to see the kids having fun.

Alderman Hamlett stated the cross display is terrific in Sorrell St Park. When this board says thank you to the veterans, we mean it. Soldiers do this not because of glory, but because of their willingness to help. Alderman Hamlett thanked all Veterans for their service and their sacrifices, we are forever in your debt.

Mr. Underwood said thank you to Alderman Hamlett and to the Board, and stated that those words mean a lot to him.

Mayor Smathers stated that one of the greatest things in this County are these crosses.

Alderwoman Proctor thanked Alderman Hamlett for his words. Alderwoman Proctor reminded everyone that since summer is coming around, please be careful.

Alderman Shepard stated that he, other teachers, and the students are almost to the end of the school year. Alderman Shepard thanked Clerk Dunbar and the Recreation Department for their work at the International Paper Complex.

### **G. Public Comments:**

Zachary Stines addressed the Board requesting that minutes be made available faster. Mr. Stines asked a question regarding public notice procedures and how the budget is being compiled in relation to public hearing.

Mr. Underwood asked the Board if they would be discussing anything pertaining to the ABC store or commission tonight? Mr. Underwood thanked the Board and town staff for their work and said, "we have the best employees around, take care of them."

Donna Walker had concerns about the proposed water rate increases for customers outside of town. Mrs. Walker noted that her water bill was originally \$47/month, then increased to \$80/month, and is proposed to rise to \$180/month. Mrs. Walker emphasized that it is very difficult for residents on fixed incomes to afford this new rate.

Mayor Smathers stated due to the mill shutting down, paying for the treatment of our waste, and to stay competitive for grants, water rates had to go up. Mayor Smathers stated we tried to keep the rates as low as possible, but we knew they rates were going to go up.

James (Last Name Unknown) spoke to Mayor Smathers directly about the proposed water rates. Mr. James told the Mayor and Board that the rate increase is unjust and in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. Mr. James also stated that the residents inside the City Limits get a break for water rates, and the outside residents should pay the same. Mayor Smathers explained to Mr. James the reason for the rate increase. Mr. James left the Board meeting.

Carol Cortwright stated that we pay double the property tax on our house, and our vehicles, we do not get a break from the new water rates because

we live in Town. Mr. Cortright stated that it was the misinformed thing I had ever heard.

Mayor Smathers said I am proud of this team, I am proud of Patty and how she deals with people who are upset every day, people can take to their Keyboards, but do not come for our staff.

## **H. Manager's Reports**

Cash: Assistant Manager Walker gave cash report

Tax: Manager Stinnett 99.9%

### **Manager Updates:**

Manager Stinnett gave the Board updates. Manager Stinnett read a letter from William Day, the letter was asking to revisit the proposed budget, and to offer a higher wage for town employees. Manager Stinnett stated that town employees could never make enough, no full-time employee makes \$13 an hour, as referenced in Mr. Days letter.

Manager Stinnett asked the Board for a consensus on removing the Bradford Pear trees from water wheel park. The Board agreed on a consensus to remove the Bradford Pear trees.

Manager Stinnett asked the Board their thoughts on moving the fence at the baseball field back to allow for more age groups to use the field. The Board agreed to move the fence back.

Manager Stinnett stated that we received an anonymous gift in the amount of \$100,000 for rec park, and this money would go to fixing the shelters, paint them, and get a new fence for pickleball courts.

Manager Stinnett stated that the fence at the International Paper complex was repaired.

Manager Stinnett gave an update on the pool project and pickleball lights. Manager Stinnett told the Board the plan is to trench through the former stage and tie into the pools power source, hopefully this will be done early summer.

Manager Stinnett stated that the new Town Hall and the new Police Department are almost done with the design phase, and the architects will present at the next board meeting.

Manager Stinnett stated that she sent out letters for mowing, but with all this rain, the grass was out of control. Manager Stinnett reminded residents in the letter not to blow grass into the street.

Manager Stinnett stated that SDR is still working and getting debris, they will get dirt piles shortly.

Manager Stinnett stated the Filter plant project is underway.

Manager Stinnett stated that the historian has completed his report for Camp Hope. Manager Stinnett reminded the Board she will bring the notice to proceed with the contract for the design of Camp Hope shortly.

Manager Stinnett stated that the 225 park St. project kick off meeting will be next week. Manager Stinnett stated that Byron is working on the CDBG Grant which has turned out to be a long process.

Manager Stinnett stated that the Chestnut Mountain emergency bridge work has started, they have also started boring on the main entrance bridge at Chestnut Mountain.

Manager Stinnett told the Board that a flood administrator will be sending out letter violations to property and business owners that did not remove items that were not correctly permitted.

Manager Stinnett stated that we can never thank our veterans enough, Manager Stinnett thanked Phil for his hard work putting up the crosses in Sorrells St. Park.

Manager Stinnett stated that employees have started signing up for their insurance plans.

Manager Stinnett stated that the road repair for Rhoda St. should be finished by the 21<sup>st</sup> of June. Manager Stinnett stated that Hyatt Pipeline hit bedrock and that is the reason for the delay.

Manager Stinnett stated that the Mill Town Market is doing great, and we are happy for them to be back this Summer.

## **Old Business**

### **J. New Business**

#### **1. Public Hearing: 2025-2026 Proposed Budget**

Alderwoman Mull made a motion to enter a public hearing for the 2025-2026 proposed budget. Alderwoman Proctor seconded the motion. All were in favor of the motion and the motion carried. The Public Hearing began at 6:44pm

Manager Stinnett read a statement to the Board regarding the new proposed budget. Manager Stinnett stated that this is going to be a conservative and base needs budget. Manager Stinnett stated that this substantial budget loss, and stated that we can do a lot with great partners.

Assistant Manager Walker stated that this proposal is from the last two budget work sessions that we had. Assistant Manager Walker talked about the proposed budget and the current expenses the Town has. Assistant Manager Walker stated that 48% of the budget is grants, and FEMA is 4% of this budget.

Assistant Manager Walker stated that the public safety budget did not change much. Chief Sluder is applying for a grant that will hopefully pay for his repeater. Assistant Manager Walker stated that the Fire Department is stable.

Assistant Manager Walker spoke about the Public Works budget and expenses. Assistant Manager Walker stated that most of the streets that are being paved is from Powell Bill and a section of Thompson Street will be paved from the vehicle tax. Assistant Manager Walker stated that the biggest expense across all departments is non departmental, which is flood recovery.

Assistant Manager Walker stated that the last normal budget was 2018-2019. Assistant Manager Walker talked about the sewer and water fund; Assistant Manager Walker showed the increase in water and sewer rates. Assistant Manager Walker talked about the new water rates and stated that if we did not raise water rates we could not operate. Assistant Manager Walker stated that wastewater is the reason for higher water rates. Assistant Manager Walker talked about the recreation fund and the repairs. Assistant Manager Walker stated that the Armory should be opened in the summer of next year. Assistant Manager Walker stated that the Recreation Department asked for the International Paper Complex roof to be repaired. Assistant Manager Walker biggest revenue for the town of canton is grants. The biggest expense is flood recovery; we are still waiting on FEMA money from Tropical Storm Fred. Assistant Manager Walker asked the Board to consider this budget proposal by June 12.

Mr. Stines asked about the \$400,000 for Chestnut Mountain. Assistant Manager Walker answered Mr. Stines, stating that this is for construction of the new bridge, insurance, and maintenance. Mr. Stines asked about the insurance enrollment, being a mid-year insurance. Assistant Manager Walker stated that insurance enrollment is mid year because it aligns with our fiscal year. Mr. Stines stated that he will continue working with Assistant Manager Walker on new insurance ideas.

Ed Underwood stated I know everyone here, and my opinion is, we are blessed to have this town leadership. Mr. Underwood thanked Assistant Manager Walker and the Board for their hard work.

Mayor Smathers thanked everyone for coming here, we truly are thankful for everyone being here.

Donna Walker stated that the town has had a challenging time with the budget. Mrs. Walker stated she thought the water rates probably had to be raised, but in July you are going to get feedback from the community.

Mayor Smathers said Assistant Manager Walker has brought the water rates down as opposed to what they were proposed to be.

Alderman Shepard stated we are trying our best to keep rates down. Mayor Smathers stated we have not raised taxes since 2013.

Alderman Shepard said we know we will hear about this in July, I was not happy when I had to make this decision, we are trying to be good stewards of this money, and this will increase my families budget too.

Mr. Cortright asked if the water graph could be added to the website so people can understand this better.

Mr. Cortright added that the grants for the recreation budget are a recurring, and they could draw up. Mr. Cortright talked about the Colonial and getting rid of it and use it towards employees, and not towards these vanity projects. Mr. Cortright asked if the County could chip in for recreation? Mr. Cortright stated there are great things for recreation like the pool, rec park, and Chestnut Mountain that County residents enjoy.

Patty Rathbone stated that the change in insurance influences all the employees. Mrs. Rathbone stated that the change in insurance hit hard for the employees and for the retirees.

Assistant Manager Walker stated we are still covering employees and their families if they are grandfathered in with the family insurance.

Mayor Smathers stated that if we can go back to some normal, we would like to see some manufacturing at the mill site, amongst other things, and in less than two years 90% of the mill buildings will be gone. Mayor Smathers stated that we are up to the challenge to start building our tax base back.

Donna Walker asked about Chestnut Mountain and some development around there. Alderman Shepard answered, and he believes that the developers got scared because of the flooding.

At 7:28pm Alderwoman Mull made a motion to leave the public hearing. Alderman Shepard seconded the motion. All were in favor of the motion and the motion carried.

## **2. Memorandum of Understanding with the French Broad River Metropolitan Planning**

Manager Stinnett presented to the Board a Memorandum of Understanding with the French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Area. Manager Stinnett said this is a continuation show support for the French Broad River Metropolitan Planning. Alderman Hamlett made a motion to approve the MOU. Alderwoman Mull seconded the motion. All voted in favor of the motion and the motion carried.

### **3. Set Public Hearing for Annexation: June 12**

Alderman Hamlett made a motion to set a public hearing for June 12, 2025, for the Robinson Ridge annexation. Alderwoman Mull seconded the motion. All were in favor of the motion and the motion carried.

**k.** Closed Session Pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11 (a)(4)(5)(6)  
Alderwoman Mull made a motion to enter closed session pursuant to 143- 318.11 (a)(3)(4)(5) at 7:43pm. Alderman Hamlett seconded the motion. With all in favor the motion carried. After a brief discussion and no action taken. Alderwoman Mull made a motion to enter the open session at 8:30pm. Alderwoman Proctor seconded the motion. All were in favor of the motion and the motion carried.

Alderwoman Mull made a motion to approve the allocation of funds for water infrastructure repairs. Alderman Shepard seconded the motion. All were in favor of the motion and the motion carried.

### **L. Adjournment**

The next regular meeting will be on Thursday, June 12, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. at the Town Hall located at 85 Summer Street, Canton, NC 28716. There being no additional business, Mayor Smathers adjourned the meeting at 8:36 p.m.

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Sam Dunbar, Town Clerk