

## **February 4, 2026**

At the Special Called meeting of the Mayor and Board of Aldermen/women of the Town of Canton held at the Champion Credit Union Corporate office on 275 New Clyde Hwy, Canton, NC 28716, February 4, 2026, at 9:00am with Mayor Zeb Smathers, Aldermen/women Mull, Proctor, Hamlett, and Shepard were present.

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

Mayor Smathers called the meeting to order at 9:13 a.m.

### **B. Roll Call**

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

### **C. Public Comments**

There were no public Comments

### **D. Closed Session: Pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11 (a) (3)(4)(5)**

At 9:17 a.m. Alderwoman Mull made a motion to enter closed session pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11 (a) (3)(4)(5). Alderwoman Proctor seconded the motion, and all were in favor and the motion carried. At 10:56a.m. Alderwoman Mull made a motion to enter open session and Aldermen Shepard seconded the motion all were in favor and the motion passed. With no action taken the open session meeting continued.

### **E. Work Session**

Manager Stinnett introduced Amanda Young, the Human Resources Manager to the Board. Amanda gave the Board an update on personnel policies and insurance regarding the Town employees. Amanda stated that she, Assistant Manager Walker, and Manager Stinnett have been researching new insurance brokers, and insurance companies to better serve the employees. Amanda stated she has heard retirees and workers struggle with the current insurance plan. Amanda stated that the broker she would like to go with is Mark 3, she continued that we received approval this morning, and we are in their pool. Amanda stated that there is a waiting period of ten days once the Broker of Record (BOR) is signed before the new broker can begin contacting insurance companies for quotes. Amanda stated that we should have quotes in a month.

Manager Stinnett stated that last year, we did not have time to look for better insurance rates, but we had to do what we had to do.

Mayor Smathers thanked Amanda for her work, and he continued that our employees deserve better insurance. Mayor Smathers stated that insurance prices are going up across the board and he likes the idea of the new broker.

Manager Stinnett reminded the Board that the town had the best of the best insurance, and it would be difficult to get an insurance policy close to that.

The Board thanked Amanda and Mayor Smathers asked that the Board be kept updated on this process. Manager Stinnett suggested that we have another work session in March, during a regular called meeting, and start the meeting at 5pm.

Manager Stinnett spoke to the Board about updating a personnel policy about benefits that carry over when an employee retires and reaches medicare age. Manager Stinnett recommended that employees will no longer have insurance through the town when they reach medicare age. Manager Stinnett also suggested, that when an employee retires, their spouse should no longer be on the retired employee's insurance plan. Manager Stinnett stated that this will not affect current employees, but

ones hired after July 1<sup>st</sup> 2026. Manager Stinnett stated that Shelia Gahagan, the town's auditor, has been trying to push this policy for years.

The Board agreed by consensus to move forward with the new personnel policy proposal.

Manager Stinnett spoke to the Board about special events that the Town provides.

Manager Stinnett stated that we are going to continue having the 4<sup>th</sup> +1 fireworks event. Manager Stinnett continued that the Town is lucky to have Champion Credit Union as the main sponsor for the event. Manager Stinnett added that an employee is a part time DJ and he has offered his services for the event.

Manager Stinnett stated that the 118<sup>th</sup> Labor Festival will be a two-day event as it has been and to keep a similar layout. Manager Stinnett stated that we will not have the air dogs show, so we can make room for the kids' corner. Manager Stinnett explained that the A&P building will be under construction, and she needs a suitable place for the kids' attractions.

Alderman Hamlett asked Manager Stinnett about the car show and asked if Joe Garnace would be in charge this year. Manager Stinnett answered yes, Joe Garnace will be in charge of the car show this year, and that he will be included in the Labor Day meetings.

Alderwoman Proctor asked if there was an opportunity to add recycle bins to the Labor Day Festival. Manager Stinnett answered yes to Alderwoman Proctor's question.

Mayor Smathers asked about ADA accessibility into the Labor Day Festival. Manager Stinnett spoke about the ADA issue from last year's festival and told the Board how it will be fixed for this year's festival.

Mayor Smathers asked about the possibility of adding one more beer tent for the festival. Manager Stinnett answered that she will speak to the beer sponsor.

Manager Stinnett stated that the Police Department's Easter Egg hunt will be moving forward at the International Paper Complex. Assistant Manager Walker reminded the Board that this is mostly privately funded event.

Alderman Hamlett asked if there will be any rides or carnival this year. Manager Stinnett answered that we have not been approached about rides, but she will reach out for clarification.

Manager Stinnett told the Board she is opened for suggestions for Labor Day and Christmas parades Grand Marshals. The Board did not have any recommendations at this time.

Mayor Smathers asked if the Police Department's national night out event will move from July to October again this year. Manager Stinnett stated yes, the event will be held in October.

Alderman Hamlett asked about pickin' in the park. Manager Stinnett answered, we have nowhere to have pickin' in the park. Manager Stinnett continued, we have a plan right now, and there will be potential places in the future.

Alderwoman Mull asked if the farmer's market will be returning to Sorrells Street Park. Manager Stinnett answered, she believes they are coming back.

Alderman Shepard asked about the farmers market using the parking lot across the street from Sorrells Street Park. Manager Stinnett stated that the group will have to ask for it when they present their application to the Board.

Manager Stinnett spoke about the Christmas events. Manager Stinnett proposed that we stop with the 5k race but continue with the drive-in movie. Manager Stinnett continued, the Santas workshop events goal was to partner with the farmers market, they did not want to partner because they had their own Christmas themed market, so we are not going to move forward with this event.

Mayor Smathers asked about the possibilities of having a movie at the pool during the summer. There was a discussion on movies at the pool and other movies during the year.

Manager Stinnett informed the Board that the ice rink will need \$5,000 in repairs to fix the rink and the platform underneath. Manager Stinnett asked the Board on how they would like to move forward with the rink. Mayor Smathers asked to reach out to the Cruso Endowment then to revisit this issue, but the Board would like to keep the rink going.

Manager Stinnett addressed the Board about the A&P building. Manager Stinnett reminded the Board that we received the CDBG grant in the amount of \$699,000, and the proposal for the project came in over budget. Manager Stinnett stated that she is applying for a PARTF grant to help make up the difference. Manager Stinnett then spoke about the design and the future plans for the A&P building.

Mayor Smathers asked about our participation with the downtown business trick or treat event of Halloween. Manager Stinnett suggested that we add a haunted train or a haunted train ride through the event. The Board liked that idea.

Alderman Shepard asked about the possibilities of posting the trick or treat map to the website. Alderman Shepard stated that this could be beneficial for new members of the community.

Mayor Smathers asked if we are adding more Christmas decorations for next year. Manager Stinnett stated that we do not have the budget to add to the Christmas decorations. The Board stated that they enjoyed this year's Christmas decorations and the hot chocolate mugs throughout Town.

Alderman Hamlett asked what the status of the new ABC store is. Manager Stinnett answered that they have been working on the new building.

Alderwoman Mull asked about the status of old town hall and when it would be torn down. Manager Stinnett answered that she does not know

the timeframe because it is FEMA related, but she will make them aware when she knows more information. Alderwoman Mull then asked about the mountain eye building that was torn down. Manager Stinnett stated that the owner has spoken with Byron, they are planning on doing something with that property.

Alderman Hamlett asked about the Colonial Theater and if there were any updates for that building. Manager Stinnett stated that stabilizing the Colonial is extremely important and this would help in the case of another flood.

Alderwoman Proctor asked if there would be any price changes in insurance if there is stabilization added to the theater. Assistant Manager Walker answered she would have to clarify that with the insurance company.

Mayor Smathers stated that safety is a legitimate concern regarding the buildings that were affected by the flood.

Alderwoman Mull asked how the Billard hall was doing. Manager Stinnett stated she was unsure about their success.

Mayor Smathers asked about the comprehensive plan and how Byron Hickox was doing with that project and then asked about the timeline for this project. Manager Stinnett stated that the project is doing well said she would get more information on the timeline.

Manager Stinnett stated that the engineers are going to downsize the new tank on Spruce Street, and the reason for that is the Robinson ridge tank will make up for the downsizing. Manager Stinnett stated that the plans should be added this week. Alderman Shepard asked what size the tank on Robinson Ridge will be. Manager Stinnett answered it will be 750 Gallons.

There was break for lunch at 12:07p.m.

The lunch break concluded at 1:03p.m.

Manager Stinnett introduced Michael Gantt, the Water Department supervisor. Mr. Gantt addressed the Board for his top needs for the upcoming budget year. Mr. Gantt stated that his department needs two new trucks, one for the meter reader and another work truck for daily operations. Mr. Gantt also asked to add another person to the department. Mayor Smathers asked if the meter reader needed a truck or could a car work. Manager Stinnett answered that a truck is preferred.

Alderman Hamlett asked what the life span is for one of his vehicles. Mr. Gantt stated that both trucks are over 10 years old.

Mayor Smathers asked Mr. Gantt if he has other needs. Mr. Gantt stated that he needs to replace some of his hand tools, the water destroys his tools. Mayor Smathers and the Board thanked Mr. Gantt and the water department for their hard work.

Manager Stinnett stated that the water department has had some difficulties with their normal workload, water leaks, and being on call. Manager Stinnett spoke about the new on call schedule with the street department to help ease that workload.

Alderman Hamlett asked when the last time Mr. Gantt had a new hire. Mr. Gantt answered 8 months ago.

Alderwoman Mull asked how many people work for in the Water Department. Mr. Gantt answered four. The Board thanked Mr. Gantt for coming.

Assistant Manager Walker stated that the Water Department trucks are in desperate need of being replaced.

Manager Stinnett stated that department heads are aware of the Town's financial needs, and she has instructed them that all requests must be of top priority.

Manager Stinnett spoke about the street department's needs for the upcoming budget year. Manager Stinnett stated that the Street Department

is asking for a new leaf truck that is \$243,000, the second need is a new dump truck, the old one caught on fire during the last snowstorm, the price would be \$73,000. Manager Stinnett then stated that the third need is a street sweeper, the price being \$267,000.

Manager Stinnett stated that morale is good within the Street Department and Josh Piurowski understands the restraints on the budget. Manager Stinnett stated that they are working on paving in the spring and working on sidewalks near the post office.

Assistant Manager Walker reminded the Board that they could use the general fund and then the Powell bill for some of the Street Department needs.

Fire Chief Wheeler then addressed the Board about his department's needs. Chief Wheeler spoke about the issues he has been having with his fire engines, and the fire department is in need of another fire engine. Chief Wheeler then asked the Board about adding another firefighter to the department and increasing the safety for the residents and current fire fighters. Chief Wheeler stated that it would cost around \$62,000 to add a new employee with insurance. Chief Wheeler stated that his last need is gear, which would cost around \$5,000.00 per person, which would be an operational budget increase of \$25,000.

Alderman Hamlett asked Chief Wheeler if these were necessary needs or if they were asks. Chief Wheeler stated that the new truck and the new gear is necessary.

Alderwoman Proctor asked if the truck he had quoted was a ladder truck. Chief Wheeler stated no, it would be a regular engine.

Alderman Hamlett then asked if there are any grants to help with the gear or a new truck. Wheeler stated yes, but they are difficult to come by and usually they have certain guidelines that Canton does not meet.

Alderman Hamlett asked about the morale within the fire department. Wheeler stated that he believes morale is high and better now that they are in their new living quarters.

Mayor Smathers asked if any of these old trucks could be sold. Chief Wheeler answered that they could put a new engine in truck 2 to make it run better, but some of these trucks would not sell. Mayor Smathers then told Chief Wheeler that there are buildings in town that have some safety issues, help us help you with the code enforcement part of his job. Chief Wheeler stated that some buildings have a permit for demolition, and there is little to do with code enforcement. Mayor Smathers then asked about the drop yard, Chief Wheeler stated that he would take a look at it.

Alderman Hamlett told Chief Wheeler, that he knows this is not an easy job and thanked Chief Wheeler for coming to speak before the Board.

Police Chief Sluder addressed the Board about the needs for the Police Department. Chief Sluder stated that he is trying to be as frugal as possible, but there are certain things that the department needs to increase the safety of this town. Chief Sluder stated that employee retention, equipment, and training for the department is his top priority.

Chief Sluder stated that currently the Police Department compensation is comparable to other police departments within the county. Chief Sluder asked for a 3% COLA raise for the employees, this would help with retention. Chief Sluder stated that a grant opened in the amount of \$50,000 for patrol car cameras that he is going to apply for. Chief Sluder then spoke about the process for up loading body camera footage, states that cloud storage is the preferred system, and the system the police department currently uses is becoming obsolete. Chief Sluder then stated the next larger ask would be replacing their current rifles and getting new ones. Chief Sluder stated that the Police Department needs new rifles because of the number of rounds and how old the current rifles are. Chief Sluder estimates this would be \$14,000-\$18,000.

Chief Sluder stated that his last request is to increase the Police Departments travel and training budget \$4,000.

Mayor Smathers spoke about the importance of uploading body camera footage and being able to upload the data quickly. Mayor Smathers believes the current system hinders the speediness for the court system.

Alderman Hamlett thanked Chief Sluder and appreciates the work he has done getting grants and the thoroughness of his presentation. Alderman Hamlett hopes that Chief Sluder is training officers to help him with writing grants. Chief Sluder stated that Captain Moore has been doing a great job not only writing grants but managing the grants.

Alderman Hamlett asked Chief Sluder about the morale within the Police Department. Chief Sluder stated that he believes his department is happy. Chief Sluder stated that having a competitive salary amongst other agencies in the County is highly important.

The Board thanked Chief Sluder for all of his hard work and hopes they will see progress on the new Police Department.

Clerk Dunbar addressed the Board about his needs for the Recreation Department. Clerk Dunbar Stated that his biggest need is a new work truck which would be around \$50,000. Clerk Dunbar then asked for the playground to get cameras, which would be \$8,000-\$10,000. Clerk Dunbar's last ask would be shade for the dog park which would be \$20,000.

Manager Stinnett stated that Mark Jones was not able to attend this meeting, Manager Stinnett then stated that Mr. Jones would want a new vehicle and that the filter plant is fully staffed.

## **F. Budget Amendment**

Clerk Dunbar presented the Board with a budget amendment in the amount of \$8,000 to be moved into the other improvements line item. Clerk Dunbar stated that this would be more replacing the basketball goals at Recreation Park.

Alderwoman Mull made a motion to approve the budget amendment. Alderman Hamlett seconded the motion. All voted in favor of the motion and the motion carried.

Manager Stinnett asked the Board about a grand opening for the new playground. After a brief discussion, the Board agreed to have the grand opening on June 1<sup>st</sup> at 4p.m. at the playground.

#### **K. Closed Session: Pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11 (a) (3)(4)(5)**

At 2:41 p.m. Alderwoman Mull made a motion to enter closed session pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143-318.11 (a) (3)(4)(5). Alderman Hamlett seconded the motion, and all were in favor and the motion carried. At 3:28p.m. Alderwoman mull made a motion to enter open session and Aldermen Shepard seconded the motion all were in favor and the motion passed. No action was taken. Alderwoman Mull made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Alderman Shepard seconded the motion. All voted in favor of the motion and the motion carried.

#### **G. Adjournment**

The next Special Called meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 11, 2026, at 6:00p.m. at Town Hall located at 85 Summer Street, Canton, NC 28716. There being no additional business, Mayor Smathers adjourned the meeting at 3:29p.m.

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Sam Dunbar, Town Clerk