

April 24, 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, April 24, 2025, at 6:00pm with Mayor Smathers, and Aldermen/women Mull, Hamlett, and Proctor present. Alderman Shepard was absent. The following proceedings were held.

A. Call to Order

Mayor Smathers called the meeting to order at 6:11 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

Alderwoman Proctor led the Pledge of Allegiance.

D. Approval of Minutes:

Alderwoman Mull made a motion to approve March 27, 2025, minutes as presented. Alderwoman Proctor seconded the motion. All were in favor of the motion and the motion carried.

E. Mayor Comments

Mayor Smathers thanked Town Staff for their work with the Easter Egg Hunt at the International Paper Complex. Mayor Smathers stated that the Cold Mountain Art Collective Gallery opened back up since the flood and he was excited to see them return.

F. Aldermen/women Comments

Alderwoman Mull thanked everyone in attendance for coming to the meeting.

Aldermen Hamlett thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

Alderwoman Proctor thanked everyone for coming. Alderwoman Proctor stated that Pisgah High School was hosting a greenhouse sale this weekend and encouraged people to support the fundraiser.

G. Public Comments:

N/A

H. Manager's Reports

Cash: Assistant Manager Walker gave cash report

Tax: Manager Stinnett gave tax report

Manager Updates:

Manager Stinnett stated that the dog park is open, town staff did a great job adding gravel and mulch to the park. Manager Stinnett stated that the playground should open in late summer, soon you will start seeing progress at the playground site. Manager Stinnett stated that we hope to open the pool by June.

Manager Stinnett gave an update on the baseball field at Recreation Park; bids for the baseball field will close on May 6th. Manager Stinnett stated that she will have a meeting with the Armory architects on April 30th, to continue discussing the design of the Armory.

Manager Stinnett gave the Board an update on the Chestnut Mountain emergency bridge. Manager Stinnett stated that Cinderella Partners is working on a change order, and they should start construction on the bridge soon. Manager Stinnett stated that the geoengineers got permission to access the main bridge for Chestnut Mountain, and hopefully we will have a scope of work soon for that project.

J. New Business

1. Obstacle Course Presentation

Tony Malinauskas of Maggie Valley gave a presentation about an obstacle course at the International Paper Complex. Mr. Malinauskas said there are not a lot of spots to do this type of racing. Mr. Malinauskas put a plan together for Western North Carolina and for Canton, Mr. Malinauskas stated that Canton would be a perfect location for this style of course. Mr. Malinauskas stated that he is working on a matching grant with the TDA to help fund this project. Mr. Malinauskas spoke about the different types of obstacle courses, and said that the IP Complex could be a good spot for obstacle course races. Mr. Malinauskas stated that this could be a great tourist attraction and a free public amenity. Mr. Malinauskas stated that races could bring in a lot of visitors and increase some revenue for the Town of Canton.

Mayor Smathers asked Mr. Malinauskas what he was asking for. Mr. Malinauskas said to help with the upfront cost of construction and to use the land at the IP Complex. Mayor Smathers asked Clerk Dunbar what he thought about the proposed project. Clerk Dunbar stated that an obstacle course would be new and different, but Canton is already going through a hard budget, and this could be difficult to achieve. Mayor Smathers asked Clerk Dunbar to continue working with Mr. Malinauskas on this project.

2. Chestnut Chase

Clerk Dunbar presented a Co-sponsorship application with the Run 828 Foundation. Clerk Dunbar stated that the Run 828 Foundation wants to have a trail race at Chestnut Mountain, but the group did not provide a copy of insurance. Alderman Hamlett tabled this decision until the copy of insurance was provided.

3. Champion Credit Union Pool Bid Award

Manager Stinnett stated that Patterson Concepts was awarded the bid for the locker room repair at the pool. Alderwoman Mull made a motion to accept the proposal. Alderman Hamlett seconded the motion. All voted in favor of the motion and the motion carried.

4. Filter Plant Land Extension

Manager Stinnett presented to the Board the filter plant land extension for Andy Francis. Manager Stinnett stated we have never had an issue with Mr. Francis and his cattle maintains the property, so the Street Department does not have to. Alderwoman Proctor made a motion to approve the Filter Plant Lot Lease. Alderwoman Mull seconded the motion. All voted in favor of the motion and the motion carried.

5. Lt Anthony Reece ABC Appointment

Chief Sluder stated that he would like to appoint Anthony Reece to become the ABC officer, that training for this position is coming up that, and it will last a week. Alderman Hamlett made a motion to approve Athony Reece as the ABC officer. Alderwoman Mull seconded the motion. All voted in favor of the motion and the motion carried.

6. Budget amendment

Assistant Manager Walker presented the Board with two budget amendments. Assistant Manager Walker stated that both amendments were for flood expenses. Alderwoman Mull made a motion to approve the budget amendments. Alderman Hamlett seconded the motion. All voted in favor of the motion and the motion carried.

7. Contract to Audit Accounts

Assistant Manager Walker presented the Board with Shelia Gahagan's CPA audit contract. Assistant Manager Walker stated that Mrs. Gahagan does a great job and we enjoy working with her. Alderwoman Mull made a motion to accept the audit contract. Alderwoman Proctor seconded the motion. All were in favor of the motion and the motion carried.

8. Budget Work Session

Assistant Manager Walker stated that health insurance provided by the North Carolina League of Municipalities is ending. Assistant Manager Walker stated that the main difference for the new insurance coverage will be the out of pocket cost and the deductible. Assistant Manager Walker stated she feels confident that Blue Cross Blue Shield is the best option, however, they will not cover retirees. Alderwoman Proctor asked what other Towns are doing? Assistant Manager Walker answered, she was not sure, and other Towns do not cover people over 65.

Mayor Smathers said this is hitting every municipality in North Carolina, is there another option? Assistant Manager Walker said no, some companies did not give us a quote for insurance. Mayor Smathers asked is this what you recommend? Assistant Manager Walker answered yes.

Assistant Manager Walker presented to the board what the COLA could be in this budget year. Assistant Manager Walker stated that she can look at a 1%, 2%, or 3% COLA, and then present it to the Board later.

Manager Stinnett stated how important it is to take care of the staff and put money in their pockets. Manager Stinnett told the Board that Haywood County employees are potentially getting a 3% COLA, Waynesville a potential 1.5% COLA, and Maggie Valley a potential 2% COLA.

Alderwoman Proctor said these are the decisions we must make, and they are difficult.

Alderman Hamlett stated that Canton is facing tough times, if you look at the first insurance option, and then the second option. The workers in Canton work hard and they need both good insurance and a COLA. Alderman Hamlett remembers what the department heads talked about last meeting with the Board and how the employees would appreciate a COLA.

Manager Stinnet stated that the other municipalities are probably doing a COLA, and doing COLA is good for staff retention.

Assistant Manager Walker said we can look at 3% COLA for the employees and bring it back to the Board. The Board agreed and would like to see what a 3% COLA would be in this year's budget.

Mayor Smathers asked the staff in attendance at the meeting how they feel about the insurance and the COLA. Mark Pace from the Fire Department said that this is why he is here, so he can learn more about the change.

Mayor Smathers stated that everything we've been through, what keeps me up the most, is affordability, you can't go out to eat with a child under \$80. Mayor Smathers stated that nothing is going to change Western North Carolina faster than affordability.

Richard Hodge stated that he knows the insurance change is not the Towns' fault, but he asked about the retirees and what plan will they go on? Assistant Manager Walker stated that the retirees will go on a separate plan because Blue Cross will not have retirees on this plan.

The Board decided to move forward with plan 2 on the insurance quotes and 3% COLA for employees.

Assistant Manager Walker stated that garbage pick-up will increase 5.2%, the Town of Canton has not been paying the disposal fees. Manager Stinnett stated that this is not because of our doings, but an oversight on Wastepro. Manager Stinnett stated that garbage pick-up will go from \$13.50 to \$18.60. The Board agreed on a consensus to break even with the new rates. Mayor Smathers asked Manager Stinnett and Assistant Manager Walker to shop around for other companies if possible.

Assistant Manager Walker discussed the proposed water and sewer rates and stated that we have not had the expense of wastewater, so this will be a change. The proposed water and sewer rates include, inside water \$23.08, inside over \$4.73, outside water \$72.14, outside over water \$9.45, inside sewer \$48.75, inside over sewer \$2.37, outside sewer \$88.60, and outside over sewer \$4.46. Alderwoman Proctor stated we do not want to do this full increase, is a lot, inside rates are going up a lot and outside rates are substantial. Mayor Smathers asked Assistant Manager Walker to proceed with breakeven rates.

Carl Cortright from Canton stated he knows the Board has a lot of love for things in Downtown Canton, maybe consider taking down the Colonial Theatre, 10 years of keeping the Colonial Theatre up, while paying \$36,000 a year in insurance is crazy, you got to let the Colonial go, it is a pipe dream. Mr. Cortright stated that recreation is a black hole, and it costs the taxpayers a lot of money. Mr. Cortright stated that this was not a dig on Clerk Dunbar, and Mr. Cortright stated that the programs are cool and sustainable. Mr. Cortright stated that people and employees are more important than buildings.

Zacharey Stines asked the Board if they ever considered offering a voluntary insurance plan, meaning, to give Town employees the option to get insurance, or higher pay with no benefits. Assistant Manager Walker answered Mr. Stines, stating that currently it has been a policy that all employees receive benefits after 2011.

Mayor Smathers stated that we need to be innovative moving forward with different options regarding these issues. Manager Stinnett stated

there will be a lot of discussions moving forward and not moving backward.

Mark Pace, from the Fire Department, stated that the people that will be affected by the insurance change and the COLA the most are people with young families, it could be difficult to provide for a family during these times.

Mayor Smathers asked if there was anything else the Board needed to discuss tonight? Manager Stinnett told the Board we are doing the best that we can.

Corey Vaillancourt asked about the increase in garbage rates and why it was happening. Manager Stinnett explained that it was an oversight in Wastepro's management. Manager Stinnett further explained that Wastepro was not charging the Town a disposal fee, but there was a change in Wastepro's management that caught the mistake. Manager Stinnett stated that Wastepro will not be making the Town pay back pay them because it was their oversight.

Alderwoman Mull made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Alderwoman Proctor seconded the motion. All voted in favor of the motion and the motion carried.

L. Adjournment

The next regular meeting will be on Thursday, May 8, 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 7:30 p.m.

Sam Dunbar, Town Clerk