

August 28, 2023

The Washington County Board of Commissioners met in Special Called Joint meeting with the Plymouth Town Council on Monday, August 28, 2023, at 6:00 PM in the Washington County Cooperative Extension Conference Room, 128 E. Water Street, Plymouth, NC. Commissioners Tracey A. Johnson, Ann C. Keyes, Carol V. Phelps, John C. Spruill and Julius Walker, Jr. were present. Also present were County Manager/County Attorney Curtis Potter, Clerk to the Board Julie J. Bennett and County Finance Officer Missy Dixon.

Attendees for the Plymouth Town Council: Mayor Brian Roth, Councilmen/women: Deborah Spencer, Gregory Boston, Mary Ann Byers, John Tharps, Sr., and Kim Williams. Also in attendance was Town Manager Joanne Floyd. Councilman Danny Wobbleton was not in attendance.

Chair Walker called the Board of Commissioners' meeting to order and welcomed all who were in attendance. He then asked the Commissioners to introduce themselves.

Mayor Roth called the Plymouth Town Council meeting to order and asked the Town Council Members to introduce themselves.

Item 1 Items for Discussion

a) Housing: Commissioner Keyes stated we need more housing assistance. Many times, citizens are not aware of what is available to them. Councilwoman Spencer stated that the Town has been busy demolishing several houses.

Mayor Roth asked County Manager Potter if Washington County had an increase in population last year. County Manager Potter said yes—7 people. Population that has been lost over the years due to attrition is being replaced by a younger generation.

Town Manager Floyd stated the Town has several properties that were foreclosed on. They would like to get folks back into their homes and back on the tax books. There are programs that help with this.

County Manager Potter said the County has predominantly been able to push the URP and SFR program grants through NCHFA. Two years ago, the County partnered with the Albemarle Commission to take this over for us. We can help get info to the residents regarding this. Councilman Boston asked how we get the word out about this. County Manager Potter stated information is put in the Beacon, on social media, posted flyers in offices and through the ministerial association. Councilwoman Williams suggested a County newsletter be sent to the residents with this information. Town Manager Floyd recommended putting info in the water bills. Councilman Boston said they had a town hall meeting for citizens. He wants to have a town hall meeting for all towns and the county. Chair Walker stated that the County is planning to meet with the Town of Roper and Town of Creswell. Mayor Roth said we need to get more folks to come into the area. He has also talked to the Housing Authorities. Councilwoman Spencer said she feels that whatever happens needs to keep going through generational boards—not stopping because the Board/Council changes.

b) Cleaning Up of Abandoned Buildings:

Commissioner Spruill said the County has a certain amount of money they can use to take down abandoned buildings. There are quite a few on Highway 64 that need to be addressed. He feels the County/Town can do a better job of cleaning things up. Commissioner Keyes said we have all got to sell the County/Town to its people. People want to feel included. We have to work together. Commissioner Phelps said he is on the TTA, and next year's Bear Festival is the NATIONAL Bear Festival, and we are expecting a large crowd. Councilwoman Spencer said she knows the Town has buildings that are falling down and need to get their things in order. Mayor Roth said the firetrucks next door will be moved to Hwy 64 and that area will be made part of the Harbor Town Vision. Rep. Goodwin put in for \$10M for waterfront improvements for all towns involved and we will get \$2M for redoing the police parking lot and redoing the old firehouse building. Mayor Roth also said that Mr. Lou Manring has purchased the block by the Bear Towne Market to refurbish the three buildings for businesses to move in. Also, the gashouse is going to be bulldozed and rebuilt and there is a lot of new construction to come. Councilman Tharps said he is trying to talk to the owners/heirs of several of the rundown houses in town. The consensus of both boards was that more funds need to be allocated to demolishing rundown houses and buildings. Town Manager Floyd mentioned there needs to be more lighting on the ends of the towns and the county. County Manager Potter said there are resources to help with heir property: addressing it in wills is one example. Mayor Roth said the general cost for tearing down a house is \$3-5K or even \$10K-20K for a building.

c) Recreation

Councilwoman Williams stated that physical health is as important as mental health and there are no good places for our citizens to go except the Senior Center. She asked what is going to happen to the Washington County High School building after the new school is built. County Manager Potter said he would like to demolish the old part of the building and bring in the Senior Center, Health Department, Riverlight Transit and possibly other entities and move operations from Washington Street to the old high school. The athletic fields are in great shape. It would be a 3–5-year project. Councilman Boston liked that idea. He said we need to have something open in the evening. Basketball and tennis courts were also discussed. Mayor Roth said they need to re-pave some of the existing courts to be allowed to be used now. Councilman Boston said the citizens need to see something being done and need to get going on project. Discussion ensued about the PARTF grant and the matching dollars that hinder us from getting this grant.

d) Safety in our Community

Councilwoman Byers said they have been meeting to discuss groups of children (gangs) that do break-is, throwing rocks and defacing property. We need to start reaching kids at earlier ages. There is a local program to help kids. She said she helped clean up trash in our community last weekend and needs more help doing this. Town Manager Floyd said the Town's Street Department is working on installing lighting (from a grant they received), hoping that it will help keep crime down. County Manager Potter said the Sherrif's Department is extremely understaffed. The County did a salary adjustment this year, but we are basically just keeping up. Commissioner Keyes wanted to thank the Plymouth Police Department for a program they run for the kids. Discussion ensued.

e) Economic Development

Councilwoman Spencer asked if the County has an Economic Developer. County Manager Potter indicated that he was it. Councilwoman Spencer asked if he could use some help. County Manager Potter said “of course”, however a full-time ED would not have enough to do and not justify the salary for that position. He stated that several buildings are finally inhabited. Site Development through Golden Leaf is working on economic development for the county. The new school will have an impact on economic development. The County is constantly working to find grants to help with economic development (i.e., Agape, Motorsports). County Manager Potter said the County has embraced tourism as its primary economic development. Discussion ensued.

Commissioner Johnson stated that the Albemarle Commission has received substantial funding for Tier 1 counties. The Albemarle Commission is going to send an ED to Plymouth to assist them. Commissioner Phelps talked about the lack of gas stations in Creswell. They need help in getting one there. Mayor Roth said he is close to announcing something coming to Plymouth.

f) Intergovernmental Cooperation Opportunities

Commissioner Keyes said it sounds like we are already working on this item. We all benefit from working together. Mayor Roth mentioned having dinners with the council/board members to get to know each other. Commissioner Walker said he would like to meet with the other two municipalities before planning a dinner meeting. Councilwoman Williams said this meeting has been great, but now she needs to see things happen.

Commissioner Phelps said that there is a program statewide to light up the state GREEN (November 6-12, 2023) by putting green light bulbs in all county buildings to show support for veterans returning to civilian life.

County Manager Potter said he has been asked to bring up finding a way to work together on the pump station that is to support the new school. What can the County do to keep it on the Town’s agenda? Mayor Roth said they are trying for another grant. County Manager Potter said that the County would be glad to write a strong letter of support.

Item 2 Public Forum

County Manager Office Assistant Kneiper stated that Mr. George Swain was the only person signed up for the Public Forum, but he had to leave. He did leave some handouts with County Clerk Bennett to distribute to the Board/Council. After receiving the handouts, Chair Walker and Mayor Roth said the Board/Council will address these questions at a later date.

Chair Walker said he felt this meeting was productive, but citizens want to see them “walk the talk.” Commissioner Keyes agreed with Chair Walker that this is a great start. He thanked everyone for being here tonight and was willing to listen. Commissioner Spruill agreed with Commissioner Keyes.

Commissioner Johnson said she may be speaking too soon, but there are two pilot programs in the works, and she will report on them when she can.

Councilwoman Spencer stated that we all have similar opportunities and should work better on them together.

Councilwoman Byers said this has been a productive meeting and that Creswell and Roper have needs too.

Councilman Tharps said he appreciated everyone attending the meeting.

Councilman Williams said she liked hearing ideas from the County and know things are coming down the road. She also appreciated everyone coming to the meeting.

Councilman Boston stated, “together we stand, divided we fall”. He was excited to be here and thanked everyone for their ideas.

Town Manager Floyd thanked everyone for coming and sharing their ideas.

Mayor Roth said he looks forward to having dinner together and is optimistic for the future.

Commissioner Johnson made a motion to adjourn the Board of Commissioners’ meeting. Commissioner Keyes seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Mayor Roth made a motion to adjourn the Town of Plymouth’s Council meeting. Councilwoman Byers seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Julius Walker, Jr.
Chair

Julie J. Bennett, MMC, NCMCC
Clerk to the Board