

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF GASTON
TOWN OF CRAMERTON

April 16, 2020

The Board of Commissioners for the Town of Cramerton met on Thursday, April 16, 2020 at 6:00 p.m., as a virtual meeting via Zoom. The meeting began at 6:00 p.m.

Board Members present: Mayor Cauthen, Mayor Pro Tempore Koutsoupas, Commissioners Susan Neeley, Donald Rice, Dixie Abernathy, and Richard Atkinson were present via Zoom.

Staff Present: David Pugh, Town Manager; Attorney Karen Wolter; Brad Adams, Police Chief; Josh Watkins, Planning Director; Joel Lineberger, Finance Director; and Wilene Cunningham, Town Clerk.

Call to Order and Determination of Quorum: Mayor Cauthen called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and determined there was a quorum.

Invocation: Commissioner Neeley offered the invocation.

Agenda: A motion was made to adopt the proposed agenda by Commissioner Neeley and seconded by Commissioner Rice. Mayor Cauthen asked each panelist to state their response to the motion. Commissioner Abernathy and Commissioner Atkinson stated their approval. Mayor Pro Tem Koutsoupas was unable to vote at this time. The motion passed with a 4 to 0 vote.

****Note 1: Due to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) State of Emergency and ordered restrictions in North Carolina during the month of April 2020, this Cramerton BOC meeting will be held via teleconference.***

*****Note 2: Information for the public to “listen-only” to this BOC meeting will be posted via the Cramerton “sunshine” email; the Cramerton Facebook Page, and on the door of Hall (155 N. Main Street).***

1. **Consent Agenda (Action Item):** Consider approval of the consent agenda.
 - a. **Minutes**
 - i. **April 2, 2020 meeting minutes.**
 - b. **Budget Amendments for fiscal year (FY) 2019-2020**
 - i. **Budget Amendment #2020-09 and #2020-10.**

A motion was made by Commissioner Atkinson to approve the proposed consent agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Neeley. Mayor Cauthen asked each panelist to state their response to the motion. Commissioner Abernathy and Commissioner Rice stated their approval. Mayor Pro Tempore Koutsoupas was unable to vote at this time. The motion passed with a 4 to 0 vote to approve the consent agenda.

2. **Agenda Items NOT Requiring a Public Hearing**
 - a. **GCL MPO: Catawba Crossings Feasibility Study Funding Participation**
 - i. **Action Item: Consider approval of funding for joint participation (Cramerton “local match”) in the Catawba Crossings Feasibility Study.** Randi Gates, presenter, stated regional discussions have taken place regarding the need to provide additional east-west transportation capacity by way of an additional bridge crossing between southeast Gaston County and Mecklenburg County. The Catawba Crossings project would possibly be a boulevard facility from NC279 South New Hope Road over to I-485 in Mecklenburg County. Mrs. Gates stated a letter was received from NCDOT recommending that we work together with the Charlotte regional transportation organization to gather funding for a feasibility study in order to be considered for assignment of a state route designation. The consultant will be required to develop and identify the purpose and need of the crossing over the Catawba River and identify the top two (2) crossing alternatives. The consultant will be required to prepare the study for the identification of the purpose and need of the crossings; preliminary planning for alignments and connections to other existing transportation systems; alternative bridge crossings that would address all transportation modes such as freight, potential bike ped

facilities on the bridge, and any transit purposes. A traffic impact analysis will be performed along with community outreach, environmental screening, and the study will provide information regarding feasibility for a route designation. Six proposals were received after a formal request was issued. Gannet Fleming, Inc. was selected to do the study. Mike Holder, former NCDOT Division 12 Engineer, is now employed with Gannet Fleming and is very knowledgeable about the history and importance of this project. The total project cost for this feasibility study is \$512,489.00 which includes federal funding along with state and local funding with matches. A federal State Planning and Research Grant was received for \$360,000.00; federal funding of \$10,800.00 for NCDOT fees; state matching funds of \$67,500.00 for federal funding; and \$2,025.00 state match for NCDOT charges; and the local match which is required for local federal funding which is using a per capita formula which includes Gaston County, Gastonia, Belmont, and Cramerton. The Board was asked to consider approval of an interlocal agreement with the City of Gastonia as they are the lead planning agency and Mrs. Gates stated she would be the local project manager. The local match for the Town of Cramerton would be \$1,819.00. Staff recommended approval of the interlocal agreement and the local match amount. Mrs. Gates stated the feasibility study would take about eighteen (18) months. The City of Belmont approved the interlocal agreement with their local match on April 6th. Gaston County commissioners will be discussing this item on their agenda on April 28th. Final contract language is being worked on with Gannett Fleming and will be presented to the City of Gastonia at their first meeting in May. Attorney Wolter stated she reviewed the interlocal agreement and had no issues with it. A motion was made by Mayor Pro Tempore Koutsoupas to approve funding for joint participation (Cramerton “local match”) in the Catawba Crossings Feasibility Study. Commissioner Atkinson seconded the motion. Commissioner Abernathy voted yes; Commissioner Neeley voted yes; and Commissioner Rice voted yes. The motion passed with a vote 5 to 0. The Board thanked Randi Gates for this presentation.

b. Parks and Recreation

i. River Amenities at South Fork Village (SFV) Apartments

1. Action Item: Consider abandoning (not reconstructing) SFV River Access and Fishing Pier due to its consistent destruction due to flooding. Pictures of damage to the amenities was shown. The full inspection report has been received at this time. The recommendation is to abandon and tear down the South Fork Village river amenity as it is damaged beyond repair. The fishing pier has been barricaded. Mr. Smallwood stated once the River Link Greenway is connected to Belmont there may be a better location for placement of a boat landing and/or fishing pier. Commissioner Atkinson asked who would be responsible for taking down the damaged structures. Mr. Smallwood stated he has worked with Blue Ridge Trail Works in the past regarding flood damage repairs. Commissioner Rice asked if any materials from the structures were salvageable. Mr. Smallwood stated he will ask Blue Ridge Trail Works about the possibility of salvaged materials being reused. A motion was made by Commissioner Rice to abandon the South Fork Village River Access and Fishing Pier due to consistent destruction due to flooding. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Neeley. Commissioner Abernathy voted yes, Commissioner Atkinson voted yes, and Mayor Pro Tempore Koutsoupas voted yes. The motion passed with a vote of 5 to 0.

ii. Goat Island Park

1. Playground Turf

a. Action Item: Consider the replacement of Goat Island playground turf. Mr. Smallwood stated a lot of hard work has been completed by the Parks and Recreation maintenance staff to get the island operable since the flood event in February. Two (2) quotes for replacement and repair of turf have been included from Churchich. The first quote is for \$60,393.07 to include cleanup of damaged turf area and materials and labor to install new turf; the second quote is for \$48,793.07 for materials only with no labor included. A quote was provided by Barrs Recreation for \$87,622.30 for labor and materials. Mr. Smallwood stated the historic flood in February placed the island under water for

three (3) days. Commissioner Abernathy asked if other options such as sand or grass as natural components could be considered. Mr. Smallwood stated the turf installed was considered to be the most resistant. He stated that sand could be used but it must be properly compacted and would require constant maintenance. Freezing of the sand would make it non-compliant and the playground would have to be closed until the sand thaws. The current turf was installed in August of 2019 and the flood occurred in February of this year. Commissioner Atkinson asked about possible repair by reusing what materials are on hand and were recovered after the flood. Mr. Smallwood stated mulch would be a better option than the sand as he feels the artificial turf would have held up in the prior floods. Commissioner Atkinson asked if the turf would have been covered with red mud or sand in any flood. Mr. Smallwood stated the turf would need to be cleaned after each flood and this type of the turf would dry quickly after storms. A small sand deposit should not be a big deal and a minor flooding event with little to no silt or sand being washed up would probably impact the turf and could be cleaned off. Mayor Cauthen asked if the \$48,793.07 quote without labor costs would restore the turf to a new like status. Mr. Smallwood said the turf should be restored back to its original status as of August 2019. Discussion was held about the cost of replacing the turf compared to the yearly placement of mulch. The mulch would need to be built back up to a minimum nine (9) inch base for the background at a cost of \$10,000.00 to \$12,000.00. Mr. Smallwood stated the flood was an act of God and there was no warranty for this type of damage. Discussion was held about the placement of rubber mulch rather than wood mulch and the fact that either type of mulch would wash away during any flood event. There have been nine (9) floods in the last one hundred (100) years. Commissioner Atkinson asked Mr. Smallwood about fall heights for the playground area. Mr. Smallwood stated fall height is measured by the highest standing platform on any structure and the minimum height is two (2) foot. Mayor Pro Tempore Koutsoupas stated this has been an unfortunate situation as the turf looked great. He asked if a transition is made back to the wood mulch if there is going to be some type of transition cost and can sand be placed under the mulch. Mr. Smallwood stated all the cribbing around the playgrounds washed away. The concrete border did not wash away and this could be built up to hold mulch. Mr. Smallwood said the mulch and sand does not meet ASTM standards for the ADA compliance and fall height. Nine (9) inches of mulch will need to be placed and sand can be under it but not included as part of the mulch. Mayor Pro Tempore Koutsoupas said he would like to see the cost including mulch and cost to build back. Mayor Pro Tempore Koutsoupas asked if there was an urgency to get this project done. Mr. Smallwood said it would take about a month for staff to prepare the area. Mr. Smallwood stated the mulch would have to be replaced annually and usually takes three (3) to five (5) inches for the playground. Commissioner Atkinson asked about using synthetic mulch. Mr. Smallwood stated it would wash away in the same sort of flood as the wood mulch and it costs more. Mr. Smallwood stated the mulch has washed away twice since he's been here. Commissioner Abernathy asked did the vendor's warranty cover a mild flood, severe flood, or historic floods. Mr. Smallwood stated the warranty did not specifically reference floods but items such as seams coming up, turf fading, border integrity, issues with installation, but nothing about floods or natural disasters. Mayor Cauthen asked the Board members if they would like to delay a decision on this item until the budget workshop meeting. The Board members consented to wait and no action was taken by the Board. Mr. Smallwood stated he would gather some additional information.

Mayor called for a five (5) minute recess.

3. **BIG BOARD:** The Town Manager stated the public hearing for MT Land is waiting for the lift of restriction on public hearings. Staff will need to be allowed time to provide mailing notices to the public. The local Masonic lodge is reaching out to the grand lodge and looking to hear back from the chairperson from the grand lodge. Mayor Cauthen stated he spoke to Brad Milton and hopes to see some progress once the quarantine restrictions are lifted. Commissioner Neeley asked the Town Manager if he had received any response back from the school regarding the Helix R artwork. Mr. Pugh stated he did not think their operations committee had been able to meet. Commissioner Neeley stated she would follow up on this item. The Town Manager stated the town's new website has been delayed due to loss of power and internet service due to recent storms. He has been working with Revize about minimizing the "So Blessed" by 25 percent and correct logo lettering. Commissioner Rice recommended that some type of announcement be provided to notify residents when the new website becomes available. The Town Manager stated he would place this information on Facebook and Connect CTY. Mr. Smallwood is working with Duke Energy about getting electricity turned on at Central Park. No work has begun on the bathrooms at Central Park at this time. Electrical power should be installed by the end of the month. Mayor Cauthen asked about the Wilkinson Boulevard Market Street improvement funds as the town has had these funds for five (5) years and there is another possible two (2) years before there will be any spending. He asked if there could be a possible issue since the state is receiving fewer funds due to the reduction in the gas tax collection. The Town Manager said he was not aware of any issues at this time. The Planning Director is working with the engineer and are trying to determine where the state's improvements will end and what the town's portion will be. Funds have been earmarked for this project and should be able to be reappropriated by NCDOT.

The Cramerton Historical Society has signed the final lease agreement and are now occupying the building. Resolutions have been completed for the historic Baltimore School. Mayor Cauthen commented that this would be a good time to reach out to Fred Glenn to help facilitate him with any additional steps.

The Town Manager stated he is working with Buzz Bizzell about wayfinding signage. Commissioner Atkinson was thanked for his technical expertise and bids have been sent out encouraging local Gaston County vendors to respond. Phase I to include NCDOT posts and poles and wayfinding signs in downtown area for kayak and canoe launches and information will be available at the May 7th meeting. Staff will install temporary signage for parking while waiting on permanent signage to be put in place. Mr. Smallwood and Mr. Watkins are working on an interactive Google map for launching pads and this can be shared with Floyd and Blackies Coffee Shop to share on their Facebook page. Mr. Smallwood stated this map will include addresses and instructions on where to park. This type of map with this much detail will take some time to prepare. Commissioner Neeley asked if there had been any update on the brownfields grant. The Town Manager stated no updates have not been received. Withers Ravenal asked if the town would be interested in looking at some other grants.

4. **Manager's Report**

- a. **COVID-19 (Coronavirus)** – The Town Manager stated he is working with the county and sharing their information. An online meeting was held with all counties with the governor's office asking about different situations about COVID and the state and when the blanket order is over in April for each county on an individual basis.

5. **General Staff Reports (as needed)**

- **Update from Two Rivers Utilities, Mr. Mike Bynum.** A copy of the report will be included in the minutes book.
- **Police Department:** Chief Adams stated the police department staff is healthy and operating under COVID 19 precautions.
- **Finance Department:** Mr. Lineberger stated each Board member may be asked by the new auditing firm if they suspect any fraud. He stated he is working on the upcoming budget and closing out the fiscal year. Mayor Pro Tempore Koutsoupas asked if funding has been received from the state for the River Link Greenway. The Town Manager stated

he needs the help of the Mayor and Board members to contact elected officials at a higher level. Attorney Wolter offered her help.

- **Parks and Recreation Department:** Mr. Smallwood stated a new e-recreation series has begin and will be held three times a week to encourage people to get outside. The River Link Greenway has been surveyed. Signage stating to “please stay on trails” are being placed to assist with marking for the property lines for the Lakewood neighborhood. Quotes are being received for a temporary connection from the current terminus to South Fork Village. Staff is working with the City of Belmont and Gaston County schools to connect the River Link Greenway to Belmont with an eight (8) foot wide enhanced trail. The Parks and Recreation master plan that was approved for the last budget is completed. This information will be presented to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board in May. Commissioner Neeley asked about the status of the natural trail on Cramer Mountain Road. The Planning Director stated the trail will be put into place once the developer begins that phase of the project.

Fire Department: Chief Foulk stated the fire department was busy after the storm on Sunday storm.

Planning Department: The Planning and Zoning Board meeting will not occur next week as the meeting needs to be through the Board of Adjustment and cannot be held via Zoom as it is a quasi-judicial meeting. Mr. Watkins stated he has been working on the town’s new website.

Town Clerk: Nothing to report.

Attorney: Nothing to report.

6. Topics of Discussion for Each Commissioners:

Commissioner Abernathy said it was good to hear everyone’s voices and wished everyone continued good health.

Commissioner Atkinson said he has noted on Facebook that the City of Belmont and the City of Mount Holly are promoting their local restaurants for takeout. He said he would like for Cramerton to do this also via social media to stay safe and eat local.

Mayor Pro Tempore Koutsoupas thanked everyone for the local support of small businesses and he appreciates that.

Commissioner Neeley stated she attended a virtual town hall today held by the Gaston County mayors and physicians and it was enlightening. She stated she continues to telework from home. She thanked staff for all they do. She stated she contacted Representative Torbett’s office about the Armstrong Road speed limit signs that are 35 to 45 to back to 35. She said she was told they are going to pass this information on and hopefully get something done.

Commissioner Rice stated we are so blessed to have such a low number of COVID cases associated with our zip code. He stated he was thankful for the recent beautiful weather and all of the community beautification projects such as the sidewalk chalk messages around town.

Mayor Cauthen stated he provided a letter to the Town Manager regarding “quick wins” that could be achieved during this time of transition. Safe lights across the pedestrian bridge and spring cleaning to include removal of derelict cars. He thanked everyone for their diligence during this time.

7. Public Comment

Note: The public comment section for the Cramerton BOC April 16, 2020 meeting will be received via email and read during this section of the meeting. No emails received for public comment by 6:30 p.m. for this meeting.

Adjournment. A motion was made by Commissioner Neeley to adjourn the meeting at 8:18 p.m. Commissioner Rice seconded the motion. Commissioner Abernathy, Commissioner Atkinson, and Mayor Pro Tempore Koutsoupas voted yes via Zoom. The motion passed by a vote of 5 to 0.

Mayor William Cauthen

ATTEST:

Wilene Cunningham, Town Clerk