

**STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF GASTON
TOWN OF CRAMERTON**

April 1, 2021

The Board of Commissioners for the Town of Cramerton met on Thursday, April 1, 2021, at 6:00 p.m., as a hybrid meeting held at the Community Center, 8 Julian Street.

Call to Order and Determination of Quorum. Mayor Cauthen, Mayor Pro Tempore Koutsoupas, Commissioner Atkinson, Commissioner Neeley, and Commissioner Helms were present. Commissioner Abernathy was absent. Mayor Cauthen determined there was a quorum.

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

Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance. Commissioner Neeley provided the invocation and the pledge of allegiance was given by all.

Adoption of Agenda for this meeting. The Town Manager asked that two (2) items be added to the agenda for direction from the Board about redirecting Town funds for loan refinancing and discussion of the EV grant. A motion was made by Commissioner Helms to adopt the amended agenda. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Neeley. The vote was 4 to 0 in favor and passed unanimously.

Proclamation

A proclamation celebrating Earth Day in as April 22, 2021. A copy of the signed proclamation will be placed in the minutes book.

Consent Agenda:

- a. Minutes
 - i. February 27th Goals and Objectives Minutes.
 - ii. March 4, 2021 BOC meeting minutes.
 - iii. March 24, 2021 BOC meeting minutes.

A motion was made by Commissioner Neeley to approve the consent agenda. Commissioner Atkinson seconded the motion. The vote was 4 to 0 in favor and passed unanimously.

Agenda Items not requiring a Public Hearing:

- a. Board of Commissioners
 - i. Expansion of Centennial Center
 1. **Condemnation for the purposes of Centennial Center Expansion**

Mayor Cauthen recused himself. Mayor Pro Tempore Koutsoupas stated there had been some new business developments regarding the Masonic Lodge. He said the Board could table the discussion for the resolution for tonight's meeting but continue with the public comment. A motion was made by Commissioner Neeley to table the discussion of the resolution. Commissioner Atkinson seconded the motion. Commissioner Neeley amended the motion that the Board table the discussion of Resolution 2021-08 until the May 6th Board meeting. Commissioner Atkinson seconded the motion. The vote was 4 to 0 in favor and passed unanimously.

- a. **Public Comment:** Mayor Pro Tempore Koutsoupas presented the Public Comment ground rules.

Cathy Young: I am Cathy Young, 530 Stuart Ridge. I am the sister to the Mayor, the realtor to the Masons, and I would like to think friend to everyone in this room. This is a difficult position that I think everyone finds themselves in. Timing is everything and timing was really off here. I want to make it clear that the Masons reached out to me weeks ago and we began the listing process at that time. This was not in reaction to any action taken by the Town to consider any changes related to the parking lot. I hope that tonight we don't do a whole lot of looking back because I think that's the not best use of anyone's time or energy. The future is so

bright right now. With their decision to sell we have already had interested parties and showings. We do already have an offer on the table and they are actively negotiating back and forth. I will say as the realtor involved the value of the Masonic Lodge is very tied to the value of the parking lot. And the parties that are interested would not be interested in moving forward if the parking lot was not there. They are interested in improving the parking lot. The Masons know the parking lot needs work. The Town knows the parking lot needs work. We all know there could be a better flow. I think we are all at a point where I think everyone is on board with making those changes wanted that everyone has worked so hard for. So, when Susan prayed and asked for grace and patience, I hope we have a lot of that here tonight. I am really excited about what this change will hold for the future. The Masons have done so much good in this Town and they are entitled to so much respect on so many levels. I am married to a devout mason of this lodge. I love the people at that lodge and I think people have been frustrated and I would just hope that on both sides we would have abundant grace and patience and kindness tonight. I thank you for tabling this decision and it is my hope that it will be end up going away. And I will not even use my last minute. Thank you.

Scott Sheehan: Good evening, I am Scott Sheehan, address of 2509 Woodwynn Drive, in Gastonia. We have tried very hard to be good stewards of this community, the citizens of this Town, and our property. We understand the need for improved parking downtown. We have diligently tried to come to a mutually beneficial agreement with the Town on multiple occasions. The art of a good deal is when both sides feel like they've won something. How do you get there you might ask, by negotiation. Every offer made to the Masons was countered. Every offer we made to this Board was severely rejected with no counter. Closing the door to negotiations makes it very difficult. I would have thought and hoped that the officials charged with the task of handling this Town's finances and decisions would have been more skillful in the art of negotiation. If you don't know how to negotiate or if you want a refresher course, I will leave a signup sheet in the foyer. Call me I will help you. I know how to do it very well. As we all grow older and start to realize that we likely have less days ahead of us than we do behind us, we start to ask ourselves how will we be remembered. What's our legacy? Personally, I want to be able to say brother Sheehan was a help to me in some way. He was a man of integrity and high moral standards. What about you. Every morning and every evening when we start or end our day most of all of us are probably looking into a mirror in our bathroom. A reflection is staring right back at us. I talk to mine. Everything my other self asks me did you do right today. Did you uphold your morals? Did you showcase your integrity? My conscience is clear and I can answer every day in the affirmative. How about yours? This Board has the opportunity tonight to allow your conscience to be clear and to add to your legacy. Do you want to be remembered as a Board of high morals and unwavering integrity? Or do you want to be remembered as the Board that cast the black cloud among this Town, the citizens, and the Masons. I ask you to ponder on these questions for a few moments and remember that there is nothing more honorable, noble, or holy than standing up for what you know to be right than standing up in opposition for what you know to be wrong. Thank you.

Jerry Woods: I have nothing else to add to what Scott said.

Brad Milton: Brad Milton, 210 Armstrong Drive. My address is Belmont, North Carolina but I am a proud citizen of Cramerton. I serve on one of the Planning and Zoning Boards here for the Town. I am also a Mason. I come here tonight as a citizen of Cramerton to speak to you. Early on in this process I was involved. Later on, I recused myself. Nobody thought there was any conflict between the Lodge and the Town at all. So, I took myself out of it until most recently when I heard that we had received a letter. The letter in it had a couple of different options for us to discuss. And the final option was one that absolutely disgusted me. I understand now that when the Board looked at discussing this it was to find out more information, and to understand as all Boards do. They want to know all of their options. It is part of their job, I get that. I also worry that one of those options, the one about eminent domain, if it ever be used for something other than a greater need. If we were a house in the middle of a thoroughfare, the last one holding up a major highway, I would gladly step aside. I understand that. But a lot of this

discussion is over a parking lot. It started off early on, us trying to work together with the Town, which we so eagerly want to do. We wanted to come up and say hey a couple of nights a month we have some elderly men that have trouble getting to the Lodge. They have to park on the other side of Town Hall. They would like to know if can we put some signs up to say that on those few nights could we reserve these spaces that are in the parking lot for these members. The rest of the month we are glad to share the lot with you guys. Thought this was great. Discussion came up as you have seen in your minutes. In your agenda there are a few little errors I did find in that, but I am not going to go through each and every one of them as time is short. But we wanted to work together, mentioning paving the lot, us striping the lot. Things went back and forth. So, in the end what I worry about is we should never use eminent domain as a means to take care of an issue that we can resolve through negotiation. I think we are all better than that and I don't think that that should be used for something like this. I hope you guys would agree. I understand I am down to my minute. But we have done some improvements to the parking lot to try and get through this. I have cold patched it myself. If we thought the negotiations were done and we were over with, we would still want to get along with the Town but we would have taken care of the parking lot in a means not quite so expensive that we could have taken care of long ago. I thank you for your time. I appreciate all of you looking into this. Thank you.

Matthew Stroupe: I am Matthew Stroupe. My address is 912 Rogosin Boulevard. That is in Lowell. I grew up in Cramerton and if I could have convinced my wife, I would still live in Cramerton, but we know how that goes. I am the Master of the Lodge at South Fork Lodge. We appointed a committee to speak with the Town being a representative of the Lodge parking lot committee and they have been doing that job and keeping me abreast of what is going and keeping the rest of the Lodge abreast. The letter that was received mentioned the options that were there. It also mentioned eminent domain taking the parking lot from the Lodge to improve Centennial Park. The centerpiece of Centennial Park is the war memorial. There are names on bricks. Three names. Two of my grandfathers and one of my father. They all fought in wars for this country against regimes that would do things like take property from citizens to use for themselves. You go down the road using eminent domain for you not doing the same that they were fighting against for the people in the memorial that you put as a centerpiece of the park. Please think strongly on your decision. Think not only how it affects the Town, the Masonic Lodge what we stand for, people who were here before us, and people who will come after us both for the Lodge and the Town. Don't take it as a light decision. I wouldn't want to be in your chair and have to make that kind of decision. Please don't take it lightly. Thank you.

Stephanie Neumann: Hi, Stephanie Newman. I'm at 87 Fifth Street in Old Town. I have been a resident of Cramerton for eight (8) years. I have visited downtown on numerous occasions as a local small business owner that has participated in vendor markets and events in the downtown Centennial Center area. I feel that the parking lot should be taken and improved. There have been eight (8) years of decay and dismissal of holes and patching and things like that on the edges that I do not feel are safe for our residents particularly now that we are seeing an increase in tourism. We have a lot of people coming in from the Charlotte area and we do have an immense opportunity for growth. One that can only be improved upon by adding the planned changes as were laid out in the agenda. Based on the timeline of events also included in the agenda that I have read, there have been a lot of pretty words about honor and integrity spoken but based on the timeline that's not my analyzation of the timeline of events. It seems to come down to money, and power, and maintaining one's property vs. a government entity, which, you know, is definitely something that one can believe in. However, based on the improvements that have not been made over the eight (8) years that I have lived in this Town. I have not seen any care taking that has been spoken of, I have not seen that care. Taking a pressure washer to the outside of the building to not allow moss to grow. You know that's one thing that definitely could have been done to improve the look of our downtown area. So, I am here to voice my approval and encouragement of the use of eminent domain in this opportunity. However, given the new light of information I understand that, you know, if there are businesses that are wanting to come in to improve our downtown area that's great, but sometimes we get to a point

where things are a little too late when you know you've been discussing things for it seems as long as the agenda has laid out. So wanted to as a citizen of the Town that is not involved with the Masonic Lodge give my support. Thank you.

William Weber: William Weber, 3105 Greystoke Court, Belmont, North Carolina 28012. I live in Timberlake so that you know it's a Cramerton address even though it's in Belmont. So, I've actually grown up here ever since I was born. I am 33 years old. So, the first thing I would like to say is you opened your meeting with a prayer right, and you said you said that you are here to take care of the land that god has given to you, correct. Doesn't the bible actually say that the dominion overth all of the earth and over all of the heavens belongs actually to the lord and not to you guys. So, my problem with eminent domain is that, I believe Brad brought it up, so that started in the feudal society and that is basically the reason why all the wars have ever happened in our history it's because you have people who exercise excess power and you always want to take it out on people who don't have that power. I know you are the lawyer and you should probably know it comes from the Fifth Amendment and that you cannot exercise eminent domain unless there is just compensation. I would like to remind you that in the Gaston Gazette the actual title for this being discussed was the Town of Cramerton will use excess force to take the Lodge. So, to me that is not just compensation. Just compensation is where the buyer and seller are unpressured. Then as far as the parking lot not being paved, we have wanted to fix the parking lot for a very long time. So, it would have been paved years ago had this back and forth not been going on. So, there is a lot of the story you are not hearing. The article was not accurate. That's really all I have to say. I would like to remind you that none of this belongs to you. Your soul doesn't belong to you, the land doesn't belong to you, the buildings doesn't belong to you. So just keep that in mind. And you talked about honor and integrity. So, I like to look at the world as sort of like a story where god has hidden details in everything. I don't know if you have read the story about Pinocchio's adventures. I don't think you should be questioning our integrity because really when you look at it you are saying you are going to use excess force. So, it sort of questions your integrity. You should really make sure you know of all the facts before making your call.

Mayor Pro Tempore Koutsoupas thanked everyone for coming out. Mayor Cauthen returned to his seat to continue the meeting.

- a. **Action Item: Consider approval of Resolution #2021-08. A Resolution of The Board of Commissioners of the Town of Cramerton, North Carolina to Acquire Real Property Required for Expansion of Centennial Center.** No action was taken by the Board. This item was tabled until the May 6th Board meeting.
- b. **Planning & Zoning**
 - i. **Courtyard at South New Hope**
 - a. **Action Item: NewStyle Communities, Inc. has submitted a Preliminary Plat request for Courtyards at New Hope consisting of approximately 13.42 acres off of S. New Hope Road. This site was recently rezoned to CZ, Conditional Zoning, to allow for the development of 30 single family detached, age restricted homes as well as two 6,000 square foot commercial buildings. A portion of the property that is Gaston County PIN 195741.** The Planning Director stated this was a follow up to the meeting that was held last fall regarding this parcel. This property was rezoned to allow for thirty (30) single-family residential lots and two (2) 6,000 square foot commercial buildings. A preliminary plat complies with the requirements of the Conditional Zoning district, the approved rezoning site plan, and the conditions that were outlined as part of the Conditional Zoning process. Staff is recommending approval of the preliminary plat and is subject to the following conditions:

- 1) Non-residential site plan reviews will be required prior to the issuance of a zoning permit for the commercial buildings to review for compliance with applicable zoning and architectural requirements.

- 2) All structures to conform to the architectural standards as approved in the Conditional Zoning conditions.

The Planning Board voted unanimously to recommend approval of this request to the Board of Commissioners. Staff is recommending approval of the preliminary plat. Mayor Pro Tempore Koutsoupas asked how soon would there be construction activity on this site. The Planning Director stated as the developer is closing out the Courtyards at Cramerton they are hoping to move directly over to this new project. A motion was made by Commissioner Neeley to accept the preliminary plat request from NewStyle Homes for the Courtyards at New Hope Road project. The motion was seconded by Mayor Pro Tempore Koutsoupas. The vote was 4 to 0 in favor.

ii. Traffic Study

1. Woodlawn Avenue Traffic Study Update: A request was received from a citizen requesting a traffic study on Woodlawn Avenue. The posted speed limit on Woodlawn Avenue is twenty (20) miles per hour. The speed study was evaluated under the newly adopted Traffic Calming Policy. The findings of the study showed an average speed of approximately 16.5 miles per hour inducting a Class Z traffic issue. There have been no reported traffic collisions in the study area within the last twelve (12) months. Increased speed enforcement has been initiated.

c. Parks and Recreation

iii. Stuart W. Cramer High School Joint Use Agreement

1. Action Item: Consider amendment to the Cramerton – SCHS Joint Use Agreement. Attorney Wolter advised the Board members that their legal firm also represents the Gaston County School System. The Town is a party to a joint use agreement and lease for property located on the Stuart W. Cramer High School grounds. There is a portion in front of the school that the Town has the right to develop and to stripe the fields under their control per the fifty (50) year lease. We have added the area where the trails behind the high school is going to be installed and added an area of about thirteen (13) acres into the prior 2013 lease agreement. Mayor Cauthen stated he was in full support of this amendment but the Town was told there would be athletic fields that the residents could use. The tennis courts and soccer fields stand idle most of the time. Eric Smallwood and Attorney Wolter will continue to have this conversation with Dr. Houchard about the Town's usage of the school's athletic facilities. A motion was made by Commissioner Neeley to approve the amendment to the Cramerton – Stuart W. Cramer High School joint agreement. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Helms. The vote was 4 to 0 in favor.

ii. Redirection of funds based on the LGC's recommendation: The Town Manager stated the Finance Director is doing a great job working almost daily with the LGC. The South State 2017 bank note has a balance of \$345,000.00 with a payment cued up to be paid in June. The Finance Director stated the proposed refinancing loan closing is scheduled for May 11th assuming approval by the LGC on May 4th. Prior computations have included financing the Goat Island loan. The LGC would like to see this Goat Island note paid off creating a savings of approximately \$51,000.00. The rounded new note would be \$2,403,000.00. Staff is recommending that the Town follow the recommendations of the LGC. A motion was made by Mayor Pro Tempore Koutsoupas to redirect the \$245,144.00 South State loan to be used to pay towards the USDA loan for a savings of \$51,600.00 as recommended by the LGC. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Helms. The vote was 4 to 0 in favor.

b. EV charging stations grant: The Planning Director stated there is a grant opportunity from the State for installation of an EV charging system that became available in January. The Town would have 180 days to install the charging station

or we lose the grant. The grant is for \$17,000.00 with the Town paying \$8,000.00. Commissioner Atkinson asked if there would be a minimum usage or charges for this station. The Town has a turnkey contract and is part of the ChargePoint network. The Town can set up the fee schedule. Commissioner Helms asked if the Town is at risk of not being able to get a contractor to install the station within the required days. The Planning Director said if we take advantage of this fiscal year then the contractor should be able to complete before July 1st if we start the process now. The grant monies will be taken out of the current fund balance with possibly moving funds at the end of the fiscal year. The charging station will be a dual port and it will be maintained for five (5) years as part of the grant. The station itself has branding opportunity where you can insert decals to make it distinctive to Cramerton. The Town will pay the full amount of the reimbursable grant and upon successful completion then the State will reimburse the Town for \$10,000.00. A quarterly report will be sent to the State and the Town will be responsible for the utility bill for the station. The designated area will be marked along with signage. Discussion was held about adding an additional camera to monitor that area. A motion was made by Commissioner Helms to direct staff in accepting the grant and proceed with any documents and needed signatures and bring back the appropriate budget amendment at the next Board meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Neeley. The vote was 4 to 0 in favor.

Manager's Report:

COVID-19 (Coronavirus): Vaccines are now available for local government elected officials and municipality staff.

Garbage Carts: The Planning Director and Code Enforcement Officer have been working with educating the citizens on Center Street, Willow Street, and Dawson Street regarding proper placement of garbage carts. The next neighborhood to be visited will be the Washington and Brooklyn area. Commissioner Atkinson asked if the Town could be more proactive and replace garbage carts without involvement of the homeowners. Some homeowners may not be aware that they can have their carts replaced without any cost. Mayor Cauthen stated there is an app-based software "See, Click, Fix" that allows municipalities to offer individuals the ability to report various repair items such as potholes.

General Staff Reports:

- **Update from Two Rivers Utilities, Mr. Mike Bynum:** A copy of report to be placed in the minutes book.
- **Police Department:** Chief Adams stated he had nothing to report. He did advise that the police department has added several new officers. Officer Henderson and Officer Wohleben will be introduced to the Board at a later date.
- **Fire Department:** Chief Foulk was absent.
- **Parks and Recreation Department:** Mr. Smallwood stated he had no updates.
- **Planning and Zoning:** The Planning Director stated he would work on ensuring the installation of the proposed EV charging station within the required 180 days. The Town Manager thanked Mr. Watkins for his professionalism in working with the City of Belmont and the recent resolution that was prepared supporting the development and alignment of the Belmont Mount Holly Connector Road.
- **Town Clerk:** Waste Management leaves a doorknocker to notify citizens with damaged carts to contact Town Hall.
- **Finance:** Kelly Gooderham with Martin Starnes will be sending out the auditing inquiry of management and Board members similar to last year asking if anything is amiss or if there are any concerns. The auditors have begun working on their interim and preliminary work prior to coming in for field work.
- **Town Attorney:** Nothing to report.

Topics of Discussion for Each Commissioner:

Commissioner Neeley gave a shout out to Waste Management for the women who are driving their trucks. She reminded everyone to remember the 3w's: wear your mask, and double mask if possible; maintain social distancing of six (3) feet; and wash your hands with soap and water, and use a 60% alcohol sanitizer if water and soap are not available.

Commissioner Helms asked if there had been any feedback regarding the resolution regarding the Belmont Mount Holly Connector Road. The Town Manager said he spoke with Belmont City Manager Adrian Miller and stated the Town's concerns. Commissioner Helms stated he spoke with Windy Kiser who voiced his concerns about the traffic impact as he lives in the Timberlake neighborhood. Mr. Kiser advised Commissioner Helms he was an electrical engineer and the utility towers could be moved but it would be expensive. Commissioner Helms asked about the recent flooding and the effect on Goat Island. The Parks and Recreation Director stated Goat Island was completely flooded and had to be closed along with four (4) other facilities. Goat Island will be closed next week for cleanup. Commissioner Helms stated due to the amount of reoccurring flooding that this is a topic that should be discussed during the budget meeting about the cost of upkeep and maintenance for the parks. Commissioner Helms thanked staff for the Belmont Mount Holly Connector Road resolution. He asked about the "Big Board" as it was not on the agenda tonight. The Town Manager said it would be on the next agenda for April 15th. Commissioner Helms asked about the Helix/R sculpture. The Town Manager stated costs are being prepared by Gary Fankhauser for the upcoming budget. Commissioner Helms thanked the Mayor and Board for handling tonight's meeting with grace. He thanked Stephanie Newman for her courage and for speaking up. Commissioner Helms offered his help to the museum. Spring break is next week and he hopes everyone enjoys.

Mayor Cauthen stated that flooding is happening more often and severely. The behavior of the river has changed over the years. The South Fork River Health Committee is looking at fundraising and asking other municipalities for help with funding for testing. Their work along with the Catawba Riverkeeper Foundation should be beneficial in helping with this.

Commissioner Atkinson stated there was an MPO meeting last Thursday and he spoke to Randi Gates about the Timberlake intersection. They discussed the status of the Belmont Mount Holly Connector Road which is going in for planning and later for engineering. The Belmont Mount Holly Connector Road is a four (4) lane divided boulevard and the right-of-way is already set for that. The proposed development will occur prior to the construction of the Belmont Mount Holly Connector Road. Eastwood Road could be extended as a two (2) lane road and used as a construction access during development of the proposed Del Webb project. Commissioner Atkinson asked about having the bridges on Wilkinson Boulevard and I-85 identified as monument bridges. He said he was not sure who he needs to speak to about this. Commissioner Atkinson stated the Historical Society will be holding a soft opening for the museum and he invited the Board and staff to visit the museum after the budget meeting on April 22nd. There will be a reception along with refreshments.

Mayor Pro Tempore Koutsoupas asked about the Duke Energy substation and future development of parcels in this area. The Town Manager stated he would ask about the landscaping plan to see what type of screening is being proposed.

Mayor Cauthen stated the article in today's newspaper did not mention how great our police and fire departments are, the Town's parks and greenways, and the recent Easter Egg Hunt, or how we are working with the South Fork River Health Committee to protect our natural resources. Mayor Cauthen commended the Town staff and elected officials for all of the work that is being done in Cramerton.

Adjournment: A motion was made by Commissioner Neeley to adjourn the meeting at 8:36 p.m. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Helms. The vote was 4 to 0 in favor.

Will Cauthen, Mayor

ATTEST:

Wilene Cunningham, Town Clerk