

TOWN OF NEWLAND

6/3/2025

BOARD MEETING



ATTENDING:

MAYOR: Derek Roberts

ALDERMAN: James Johnson, Gail Haller, Christie Hughes, Kenan Foxx,
Dave Calvert

GUEST: Vicki Caraway, Kenny Caraway, Donetta McKinney, Vanessa Angrisani,
Theresa Foxx, Nancy Davis, Crystal Wise, Jane Wise, Butch Hughes, Nathan Miller,
Nathan Gitter, Susan Johnson

STAFF: Police Chief Michael Fields, Police Captain Chris Clark, Town Clerk Jessica
Buchanan, Town Manager David Epley, Public Works Supervisor Gary Lewis, Town
Attorney Gerald McKinney

Mayor Roberts called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance. Mayor Roberts asked if there were any additions or changes to the agenda. Alderman Foxx motioned to adopt the agenda. Alderman Calvert seconded the motion. All agreed by a show of hands and stating aye.

FOURTH OF JULY PARADE

Jessica said she had several people call and ask if we were going to have a parade. In previous meetings, we had discussed it would be on July 4th; however, she heard it had been changed to July 5th. She asked for some clarification, so she knew what to tell people who were calling and asking about the parade. Alderman Calvert said he spoke with Mike Nelson today, and he told Alderman Calvert that he was holding his activities on July 5th. However, during previous board meetings, we have discussed having it on July 4th. Mr. Nelson said he thought Alderman Calvert and his band were going to play music at his festival, and he told Mr. Nelson he was not aware of that fact. He said he wasn't sure if we had budgeted anything for fireworks, and Mayor Roberts confirmed that we did not. Alderman Calvert said Mr. Nelson was also planning on doing food trucks and vendors. Tammy was going to take care of the food trucks, and he asked who would be contacting the vendors. He said he wasn't sure if there was a plan in place and asked Mr. Nelson if he had done any advertising; Mr. Nelson replied that he had not. Alderman Calvert asked if the Town is doing anything with this and if we have budgeted or committed to anything related to fireworks. Mayor Roberts stated that we decided not to allocate any funds for fireworks in the last budget. He believes the discussion had rolled over to Mr. Nelson because he had spent so much money on his fireworks, and if the Town wanted to donate some money towards his fireworks, then we could. He said he thought that Christian Gardner was still going to put together the fishing tournament as well. Vicki Caraway said she would ask Jacki Nelson if she was going to invite the vendors and if there was a plan in place of where to put them. Alderman Calvert asked if Mr. Nelson was aware that the Town didn't have any money to donate towards the event, and as of now, it appears that the Town is not involved in the event. He asked if we were going to have a parade, and Jessica said that was what she was wondering. Alderman Calvert said we didn't have a committee, and we didn't have a designated place to start and end, as we have in the past, due to construction. Unfortunately, this year, we may have to pass on it because it's a little late to put a plan together, and we certainly don't have a parking lot that we have had in the past to use. Mayor Roberts said this was the most un-American thing he had heard in a long time and the fact that we are not trying to set up parking around the County Square. Alderman Calvert asked if there was anything that could be done with or without Mr. Nelson at this point. Alderman Hughes suggested the parade starting at the County Square. Alderman Calvert said he wasn't against having a parade, but who would be in charge of organizing

it? He asked if there was anyone in the audience who wanted to take this and run with it or if anyone on the board was interested in doing it. Mayor Roberts said he would do it and asked what time they wanted to do the parade on July 5th. He said the lineup would start at 3:00 at the County Square and would begin at 4:00, and the parade would end at Schultz Circle. Nancy Davis asked if they would be interested in Elizabeth Rector organizing the parade. Mayor Roberts told her to reach out to Jessica. Town Manager David Epley stressed that the Fire Marshall is pushing Mr. Nelson to get the required permits he needs to shoot the fireworks.

PRESENTATION OF 25-26 FISCAL YEAR BUDGET

Mayor Roberts told the audience that this was just a presentation of the budget, and Mr. Epley said they would call for a public hearing after he reviewed what he had proposed. He said in normal circumstances, they would start the budget process in March. They would have held several budget workshops, had a good idea of what the board wants to budget for, and the presentation would have been made by now. However, since he has only been here for a few weeks, this is the way they have to do it this year. Due to circumstances that have occurred over the past several years, our fund balance has been depleted, and we are currently on the watch list with the LGC because we missed our 2024 audit. We had NCLM working on that audit. However, they stopped. We have been back in touch with them to get them back on board within the next week or so to complete that audit. They were seeking stability and someone with experience before jumping back on board. David stated that his vision for the next three (plus) years is to get the Town back in a position where we can rebuild our fund balance to a level suitable for the LGC. Four years ago, our fund balance was adequate for the LGC, and as for the amount of fund balance available, it was approximately 80% of our total budget. They recommend 80%; however, that depends on the size of the Town you are. For a Town the size of Newland, they would like to see us at least 50% of our total budget. David read the budget message for FY 25-26 (*please see the attached budget message with the minutes*).

SET A PUBLIC HEARING TO APPROVE THE 25-26 FISCAL YEAR BUDGET

David recommended that the board call a public hearing sometime during the last week of June, as this would enable us to bring forward year-end budget amendments that need to be made. Mayor Roberts asked if everyone was okay with Tuesday, June 24th, and the board agreed. He asked Jessica to advertise the public hearing for 5:00. Alderman Johnson then asked Attorney McKinney if they could take action at the public hearing. Attorney McKinney said they could have the public hearing but then vote during a meeting. Alderman Johnson asked if they needed to hold a special meeting to discuss the budget after the public hearing, and Attorney McKinney said yes. Jessica asked if they wanted her to advertise the special meeting at 5:30 or 6:00. Alderman Johnson said 6:00. Alderman Calvert spoke on behalf of himself and possibly some other small businesses in Town, stating that a 20% increase in water and sewer rates would be an extra \$1,200 a year that they cannot afford if business is slow. Businesses with higher usage are going to pay more, and he believes that percentage needs to come down. He asked if there was a plus or minus as far as the bottom-line figure goes on this current budget. David said it was a balanced budget, which is required by statute. He said there are things built into the general fund that will allow us to operate at a surplus, but that cannot be done until the fiscal year is complete.

FLAGS

Alderman Foxx told Mayor Roberts how much he appreciated the flags throughout Town. Mayor Roberts said the reason he was bringing it up was that he would like the Town to take over when it comes to replacing the flags. He has been buying flags for the last three years and doesn't really want to do it anymore.

RIVERWALK / LIGHTS

Mayor Roberts asked if there was money in the budget to have an electrician inspect the lights on the Riverwalk, and David said yes. Mayor Roberts said this discussion came up a few months ago and was shot down. He asked the board if anyone had an issue with the town manager finding an electrician to inspect the lights. The board was in consensus to let David move forward with this.

MOVE PUBLIC WORKS SUPERVISOR BACK UNDER TOWN MANAGER

Alderman Foxx motioned to moved the public works supervisor back under the town manager. Alderman Haller seconded the motion. All agreed by a show of hands and stating aye.

MAYOR PRO TEM APPOINTMENT

Mayor Roberts asked who was going to be next. Alderman Hughes motioned to appoint Alderman Calvert as Mayor Pro Tem. Alderman Johnson seconded the motion. All agreed by a show of hands and stating aye.

NORDIC PC

Mayor Roberts asked Alderman Haller and Alderman Hughes what was going on with Nordic PC. Alderman Haller said she didn't know what he was talking about, and he replied that he was referring to the emails. She asked if he was talking about the email he had sent. Mayor Roberts asked why they had contacted Nordic PC to have the finance officer and town manager emails forwarded to them. Alderman Hughes said she called them because Sandy asked her to keep up with everything, and Alderman Haller was the deputy finance officer. Alderman Haller said she has not called Nordic, and if she has done something, then she will admit it. Mayor Roberts asked why Nordic was saying that someone called, representing themselves as the MPT for the Town of Newland, and Alderman Haller said she could not answer that for him. Alderman Hughes stated that it was a public record, while Mayor Roberts disagreed, claiming it was not. He said that Nate, who runs Nordic PC, is pretty upset about the situation. Alderman Hughes said that she told Nordic to send the emails to Alderman Haller because she was the deputy finance officer and Mayor Pro Tem. Mayor Roberts asked again what was the purpose of doing this before she resigned. Alderman Hughes said it was to keep up with the finances and FEMA information in case any action needed to be taken. Nancy Davis asked Alderman Hughes if the rest of the board knew she was doing this, and she said no. Ms. Davis said they needed to be working as a cohesive group. Mayor Roberts asked Chief Fields if Nordic had to go through SBI background checks to manage our account. Chief said they had to go through the same NCIC cybersecurity training that the police department does. He said Nordic probably has more certifications because they do more on their end. Mayor Roberts said he was clarifying how sensitive this information was because Nate was, and is, very upset about it. He said a few months ago that Sandy called Nordic and had the same request and was told the same thing. She had to have a court request or a letter from the town attorney, and when it was inquired as to why she was doing this, she clearly stated that she was preparing to sue the Town for harassment. He asked Alderman Haller and Alderman Hughes if something was going on between the three of them and if they were conspiring together to sue the Town for harassment. Alderman Haller said she had no reason to sue the Town for harassment. Mayor Roberts said he wasn't talking about her; he was talking about Sandy, and if she wanted to sue the Town, then that's fine. He said he didn't understand why nobody on this board thought to pick up the phone and have any emails forwarded. He said that when Sandy resigned, Alderman Haller and Alderman Hughes took it upon themselves to call and implement these lockdowns. Alderman Haller said she did that at the recommendation of an attorney. Mayor Roberts said that everybody's final agreement was for two board members, or a board member and the mayor, to accompany Sandy into her office when she collected her belongings, and then Alderman Haller came in with Sandy on a Sunday by herself. Alderman Haller stated that Sandy informed the board she would do that via email, but Mayor Roberts claimed she never did. He said she walked out with a code book, and who knows what else she took with her. Alderman Haller said that was her mistake. He said that when she took Jessica to Sandy's office one day, and he came over to do the walk-through because they had to lock down state secrets, they agreed there would be two people. Alderman Haller told Mayor Roberts that he didn't have to worry about her doing anything; she had not called Nordic, she had not conspired with anyone to do anything, and Sandy was her friend. Alderman Calvert said locking the door was for the protection of everybody, so there would be no questions asked.

CENSURE VOTE

Mayor Roberts moved on to the public works report, and Alderman Hughes asked him if he was going to vote. He said there was no way he was going to get another vote. She said you might, you can try it and see. He said there's no way he would get another vote.

PUBLIC WORKS REPORT

Gary said we would have a new pump for Tweetsie next week. They are putting in the one we removed right after Helene. He said there is a lot of trash in the system, and they were jetting the lines at the Ingles pumping station

today. There was so much debris on the floats that it was holding them down, and they wouldn't let it come on; however, they pumped a lot of it out. He informed Mayor Roberts that forty-one of the Riverwalk lights had been submitted on a FEMA ticket to be replaced. He also has quotes for the dog park fence, the Town Park fence, and Sokassa. Mayor Roberts asked if they could proceed with removing all the fences. Gary said the dog park fence had been removed, and he had taken some down at the Town Park so they could mow. He said he would try to get the rest taken down, and all of those were submitted on FEMA tickets. Mayor Roberts said we were not going to receive anything from FEMA, and at what point do we start exploring alternative ways to repair these things? He said we could start getting quotes from people, and Alderman Hughes asked how are we going to fix it with no money. Mayor Roberts said he believes that David has already figured out it's not as bad as everybody says it is, and he agreed. David said we had several applications submitted to FEMA and have had several meetings lately. He said we will receive funds from FEMA at some point; however, it is going to trickle in. There are other funds available through DEQ and the Department of Commerce. He said he has been throughout the Town, and it is unbelievable the amount of destruction here. We are going to work hard to get as much funding as possible, and he was confident that we would also receive FEMA funds. Gary said he was told at the last meeting, which was two weeks ago, that the first ticket had been approved for reimbursement for all the overtime and generator use and that the amount was \$40,000. He was told there was a thirty- to forty-day timeframe before North Carolina was reimbursed. Susan Johnson said she attended the Elk Park town hall meeting last night and asked if we were applying for the Community Development Block Grants, as \$44 million has been designated for western North Carolina. David said that was the Department of Commerce grant he was referring to earlier. She asked if there would be a public hearing for that, and he said they would be required to have one at the point of application. Mayor Roberts asked Gary if he could start tearing the fence down at Sokassa to make it look a little better. He said he was trying to put it back up, but the wind blew it back down before he could tie it down.

POLICE REPORT

Chief Fields stated that his department had 387 activities for the month of May. Notable calls included two arrests for possession of methamphetamine, and both arrests were the same person. They charged three persons with breaking and entering and larceny. There were thirty-six traffic stops, and eleven citations were issued. They received twenty requests to assist other agencies, eight trespassing calls, and three reports of unwanted persons. Chief said they had a call come in as a stabbing at Ingles about a week ago, and during the investigation, they found out nobody was stabbed or fatally injured; it was just a heated argument between two people. Two individuals were not from the area and did not wish to press charges. He submitted another grant for \$45,000 for new handheld Viper radios, as the ones the department currently has are outdated and no longer manufactured. He should hear back later this month or early next month about the grant he applied for the car.

FINANCE OFFICER REPORT

David said he had included a year-to-date actual budget report for the board to review and see where we stand today. They can take some time to prepare and review to see how he came up with the numbers for the 25-26 FY budget. Jessica said the tax rate collection for the year so far was 96.82%. She printed out the top delinquent tax accounts and explained that if we could collect that money, it would cover most of the current year's taxes and a significant portion of the prior year's taxes. She said they had four forms submitted for May for occupancy tax, with a total amount of \$2,181.57.

TOWN MANAGER REPORT

David said his focus has been on trying to figure out our financial situation and preparing a budget for the board since he arrived. In the future, some of the issues that are in dire need of attention are land use, zoning, and code enforcement issues. He stated that we have received some complaints that need to be addressed, which pertain to the public nuisance ordinance that was recently passed. There are resources available where we can find someone to review and modify all of our codes, and it won't cost anything. He said it was okay for the town manager to initiate the issues; however, we needed a code enforcement officer, who should be one of the officers in the police department. They are the ones who are throughout Town daily and see everything. Mayor Roberts asked the Chief which officer he wanted to be the code enforcement officer, and he said he wasn't sure yet. Mayor Roberts asked who was the best at doing paperwork, and both Alderman Hughes and Chief replied it would be Officer Isaacs. David said they could take a look at it later, but they could also add an incentive for that officer because it's going to

be a lot. Alderman Foxx asked if they needed to set up a workshop to look over the codes, and David said they could do that. He would like to get the lead folks in here, and they have a whole team of people who modify codes based on the size of the Town. He said he would let the board know when they would be available.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Mr. Gittner thanked the Town because they will be opening the restaurant for dinner tomorrow night and will be open four nights a week initially. He asked if he could go pick up some of the old streetlights and inquired about their cost. Mayor Roberts said they had a plan in place and asked Gary how much they had decided on. Gary said he thought it was \$100 a piece, but Mayor Roberts said to charge \$50 a piece. Mr. Gittner inquired about the status of the tourism tax. Jessica asked if he was referring to the occupancy tax, and he replied, "Yes." She said they had four forms submitted for May, totaling \$2,181.57, and there are two applications for the TDA. He asked how many people there needed to be and what the status of his application was. If this money is coming in, he said he knew two organizations who were really interested in it. Mayor Roberts asked what was going on with the Airbnb's in Town, and Jessica said she had received one form. He asked if there was only one in Town, and she said no, that was the only one who submitted a form, along with two online, and Mr. Gittner. Jessica said she couldn't remember if the TDA needed three or five members, and she would need to go back and look. Mr. Gittner asked if they couldn't approve any of the applications that have been submitted until a minimum amount has been submitted. Mayor Roberts said that's what it sounds like. Mr. Gittner said he would bet that's not what the Newland statute says.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mayor Pro Tem Calvert said David was talking about finances and mentioned what a great job Sandy had done by basically hunkering down and not spending any money. He thanked David for acknowledging her for doing a good job. David said it was a positive, and it allowed the fund to sustain itself. However, there were a few issues on the utility side that he had to resolve. He said for some reason, there was an overestimate in revenue, and it's hard to increase that line item by \$100,000 without a utility rate increase. Alderman Hughes said Sandy may have been planning a rate increase, but it never happened because they had discussed it previously. David said that some insurance proceeds had come in and gone out, so those were accounted for. Mr. Gittner said he has looked at other municipalities, and one of the things he sees on their websites is that they aim to make the waterworks side revenue-neutral. David said that's all we want to do is break even on the utility side. The prior year, utility revenue was budgeted at \$450,000. For FY 24-25, the revenue projection was \$555,000, with no rate increase. He asked Jessica if they continued to collect for utilities during Helene, and she replied yes. She said if people had to evacuate their homes, they would call and inactivate their accounts, and they wouldn't be charged if they did so. Alderman Foxx motioned to go into a closed session. MPT Calvert seconded the motion. All agreed by a show of hands and stating aye.

CLOSED SESSION – TOWN MANAGER'S CONTRACT

Let the records show no action was taken during the closed session.

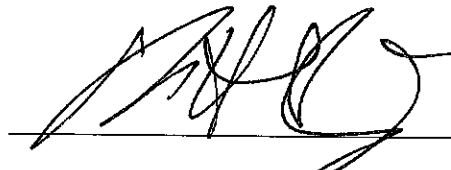
ADJOURNMENT

Attorney McKinney told Mayor Pro Tem Calvert they would get an oath drawn up, and then they could swear him in. Alderman Johnson motioned to adjourn the meeting. Alderman Foxx seconded the motion. All agreed by a show of hands and stating aye.

MEETING ADJOURNED AT 7:32 PM



Town Clerk, Jessica Buchanan



Mayor, Derck Roberts

