

**TOWN OF COATS**  
**Board of Commissioners**  
**Thursday, January 18, 2018**  
**Work Session**

The Town of Coats Board of Commissioners met in a scheduled work session on Thursday, January 18, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. in the Board of Commissioners' Meeting Room at Coats Town Hall.

**Members Present:**

Mayor Chris Coats  
Mayor Pro-Tem Marc Powell  
Commissioner Allen Mosby  
Commissioner Kelvin Gilbert  
Commissioner Shirley Allen

**Staff Present:**

Nick Holcomb, Town Manager  
Connie Lassiter, Finance Director/Town Clerk  
Mike Collins, Parks & Recreation Director

**Members Absent:**

Commissioner Jerry Beasley

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

A quorum being present, Mayor Chris Coats called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Mayor Coats delivered the invocation and led those in attendance in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**II. WATER FUND PROJECTS**

Town Manager Nick Holcomb announced that the bid opening for the waterline replacement was held today, and the low bid was a little over \$1.175 million. The Town would need to come up with about \$175,000 to cover the difference from the one million dollar water improvement grant. Mr. Holcomb mentioned that it would be quite manageable using the \$665,000 that was transferred to the water fund from the ARPA funds. The \$175,000 overage on water replacement project plus the estimated \$425,000 for AMI meters equals \$600,000 which would be under the ARPA transfer amount.

Mr. Holcomb added that a resolution to proceed with bid would be presented at the February 8 meeting pending any discrepancies with the low bid.

Mr. Holcomb noted that the meters were on site and expected installation in the month of March. The signed contract was for 422 meters and per meter price would remain unchanged. The total cost could fluctuate if meter count changes.

**III. POLICE RECRUITMENT**

Town Manager Holcomb cited the wide spread problem everywhere with police officer recruitment and retention and referenced the following statistics from the State of North Carolina:

- 506 fewer recruits took the Basic Law Enforcement Training exam last year than in 2019
- Law enforcement retirement increased by 45 percent and resignation increased by 18 percent in 2021, according to a national survey

- There were 492 more law enforcement separations than new appointments in North Carolina between 2020 and 2021

Police Chief Ken Storicks informed the board that one officer had been hired as a civilian and was expected to be sworn in next week when the official word from training and standards was received.

He reported that two officers left in September; one went to Smithfield for a \$10,000 increase and the other went to Angier for a \$12,000 increase. He expressed concern that it would continue to happen even though the officers liked working here. Chief Storicks acknowledged that a lot of agencies were feeling the crunch and were short-handed, but the difference was that we were a small department that could only be so short on staff before it affected road patrol coverage.

Chief Storicks addressed the vacant SRO position and mentioned three leads that fell through with an example of one potential candidate that he tried to recruit, but she was currently making \$64,000 as an SRO officer and our starting pay was only \$40,000.

Town Manager Nick Holcomb noted that salary was the biggest and easiest thing to point to when considering recruitment and retention; however, in order for the board to address the problem within what the budget could hold, he outlined the following items to consider for ways to alleviate police staffing shortages:

- Focus on better training future officers
- Placing emphasis on the community service aspects of the position
- Sign on bonus to recent BLET graduates
- Financially sponsoring BLET candidates
- Retirement benefits
- Loan Repayment
- Salary

Chief Storicks stated that sponsoring BLET candidates was like rolling the dice because the candidate could drop out, fail school or fail exam.

Commissioner Kelvin Gilbert inquired about doing a sign-on bonus with a two-year contract. Chief Storicks responded that it would be necessary to obtain an attorney to recoup from defaulting candidate. Mayor Pro-Tem Marc Powell suggested a potential graduated bonus paid over a period of time.

Chief Storicks presented the board a handout illustrating a potential salary increase for current officers based on a starting salary of \$50,000 which is up from the current starting salary of \$40,000. This did not include cost of benefits.

Mayor Chris Coats asked what methods other than BLET academy were being used for recruitment. Chief Storicks responded that positions were being advertised on the Coats Police Department Facebook page, Police One website and by word of mouth.

Commissioner Shirley Allen posed the question of what it would mean for the town financially if the starting salary was increased to \$50,000. Town Manager Holcomb answered that the current year would not be impacted because we are 60% through the year and it would simply be a vehicle we wouldn't buy and salaries that haven't been paid due to vacancies. The impact would be felt in the following years when we couldn't pay out that increase with the same amount of revenue coming in.

Board discussed the following:

- Ramifications of increasing property tax now (mid-year)
- Property tax rate and upcoming re-evaluation as a factor for potential revenue increase.
- Conducting exit interviews
- Sustainability of pay increases

Mayor Chris Coats asked about his sales pitch to potential candidates excluding discussion of salary to work for the Town of Coats. Chief Storicks replied with the following:

- Training was provided (when fully staffed)
- Not a lot of crime
- Opportunity to work case under supervision of detective
- Sleepy little town
- Comradery of staff, like family
- Great administration

Commissioner Allen Mosby requested that Town Manager Nick Holcomb and Finance Director Connie Lassiter present the total cost of the requested increase in police salaries including benefits, taxes and any other associated costs to the board quick so that the board would have the numbers in front of them to review.

Town Manager Nick Holcomb offered that the information could be given to the board in the agenda packet for the next board meeting since it was not too far away. Mr. Holcomb mentioned that the additional cost for the remainder of this year could possibly be handled by a line item transfer within the department from vehicles to salaries, but he expressed concern for the upcoming fiscal year budget and subsequent years.

The board agreed that the information could be included in the next agenda packet.

Mayor Chris Coats called for a short recess at 7:28pm. The meeting resumed at 7:33pm.

#### **IV. DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION GRANT**

Town Manager Nick Holcomb reminded the board that the \$500,000 grant we would be receiving from the state was based off the downtown streetscape plan that Mayor Chris Coats shopped to Representative Howard Penny. There was the option to use the grant to have WithersRavenel take the whole amount just to do the engineering and managing the bids and construction to have the downtown streetscape plan as a shovel ready project, but there would be nothing visible or tangible for the citizens to see.

As an alternative, Mr. Holcomb displayed pictures of projects that WithersRavenel did in other towns that illustrated items that could be done for about the amount of the grant. The area at Farmers Corner and the alleyway across from Farmers Corner was discussed as potential location for project as well as dressing up front of town owned buildings. String lights, benches and trash receptacles were specifically mentioned as desired items.

The consensus of the board was to do something with the grant that could be seen.

**V. ADJOURN**

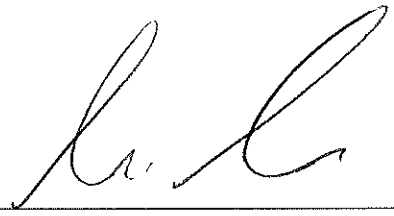
**RESOLVED**, to adjourn the work session.

**MOTION BY: Commissioner Shirley Allen, SECOND BY: Commissioner Kelvin Gilbert  
APPROVED: 4-0, unanimously approved**

Meeting adjourned at 7:57 p.m.

The attached documents of reference are incorporated herewith and are hereby made a part of these minutes.

  
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Connie Lassiter, Town Clerk

  
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Chris Coats, Mayor