

Town of West Jefferson - Board of Aldermen
Regular Meeting Minutes
October 7, 2024 | 6:00 pm

Board Members Present: Mayor Tom Hartman, Alderman Rusty Barr, Alderman Calvin Green, Alderman John Reeves, Alderwoman Beth Shelton, and Alderman Stephen Shoemaker

Town Staff Present: Town Manager Brantley Price, Town Attorney Jak Reeves, Assistant Town Manager Rebecca Eldreth, Wastewater Superintendent Brandon Patrick, and Police Chief Brad Jordan

At 6:00 pm Mayor Hartman called to order the meeting of the Board of Aldermen. After the invocation was given, those in attendance stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of October 7, 2024 Agenda – Mayor Hartman requested to add an update from Patty Gambill on Hurricane Helene. Alderman Reeves made the request to move the ABC appointment to closed session. Following the request, Alderman Reeves made the motion to approve the agenda with the additions. Alderman Green seconded the motion with a vote of 5-0 in favor.

Regular Session

Approval of Minutes – With no discussion, Alderman Barr made the motion to approve the minutes as presented for both meetings. Alderwoman Shelton seconded the motion with a vote of 5-0 in favor.

Update from Patty Gambill on Hurricane Helene – Emergency Management Patty Gambill provided an update to the Board on Hurricane Helene. The National Guard completed 3 swift water rescues. There has been 1 confirmed death, and no missing persons reported. A total of 199 structures received minor damage, 307 structures received major damage, and 151 structures were destroyed. Structure is defined as a building, road, or bridge. Only 10 people are housed in the shelter. To date only 2,800 are left without power. Daily calls are held to address the needs of the fire departments throughout the county. The County has applied for a Disaster Recovery Center. FEMA is for individual assistance in the form of grants not loans. Businesses may apply for a loan through the SBA.

Consideration of Approval for Offer and Acceptance Letter and Resolution for Downtown Stormwater Project – The Division of Water Infrastructure has approved our stormwater project for the projects as the library, West Jefferson United Methodist, West Jefferson First Baptist, and the Wastewater Treatment Plant. With no discussion, Alderman Shoemaker made the motion to approve the Offer and Acceptance Letter as well as the Resolution as presented to accept the funding. Alderman Reeves seconded the motion with a vote of 5-0 in favor.

Budget Amendment #2 – The budget amendment is to complete the Town Hall renovation and the extra expense from paving. With no discussion, Alderman Barr made the motion to approve the budget amendment as presented. Alderman Shoemaker seconded the motion with a vote of 5-0 in favor.

Discussion of Board of Adjustment Date – The Board agreed to meet before the next regularly scheduled meeting at 5:30pm.

Police Report – Chief Jordan gave his report to the Board for the month. The department has increased patrol and more residential. The Board thanked Chief Jordan for his report.

Water & Wastewater Report – Wastewater Superintendent Brandon Patrick gave his report to the Board. The Town received almost 20 inches of rain for the month due to Hurricane Helene. Gas fueled pumps were used to handle the flow of over a million gallons at the plant. Power was lost to one well but is now back on. The filter plant is producing about 90,000 gallons per day. The Board thanked Brandon for his report.

Maintenance Report – Maintenance Supervisor Eric Miller gave his report to the Board. Monthly totals were reported with 26 locate tickets, 3 water leaks, and 2 sewer issues. The department completed 2 sewer taps, 3 water taps, cleaned up storm debris and cleared storm drains. The Lansing Fire Department lost 2 trucks, so all fire departments are pitching in to cover more territory. The board thanked Eric for his report

Town Managers Report – Town Manager Brantley Price gave his report to the Board. Brantley started his report with speaking of the flooding that occurred due to Hurricane Helene. A thank you was given to the entire staff during the storm. West Jefferson did not receive major damage to the downtown, but there were some businesses on 221 Business and Buck Mountain Road that did receive major damage including the Fire Department. Cleanup is still underway, and we feel sure that the town will receive additional funding from this storm for culvert repair. A supply distribution site has been set up at Jimmy and Jean's on Hice Avenue with 200 gallons of diesel fuel and 300 gallons of gasoline to be distributed thanks to the generous donation of the Cajun Navy. North Carolina Department of Transportation reported that Highway 88 West along with Big Laurel are the biggest concerns at this point with 70% of the road assessment complete at this time. The Blue Ridge Parkway is closed indefinitely due to the damage. The Town of West Jefferson is open to visitors but asking for those who want to visit to check with their accommodations before making the trip. Bid opening for the WWTP and sewer line extensions with Carolina Grading as the only bidder with a bid of over \$4.5 million. The town is currently reviewing with the contractor and suppliers to see what options are best for the available funds. Blue Ridge Energy serves as an intermediary for the USDA for a zero-interest loan program that the town project may qualify to receive funding. Blue Ridge Energy is willing to review the request to determine the project's eligibility. Construction has begun at Paddy Mountain Park including pouring of the footers, completing the rough plumbing, the slab will be poured this week, and the grading is almost complete. Taxes collected to date total 73% of the levy. Sales tax is up 3% from the prior year. Brantley then reviewed the opinions of Town Attorney Reeves on engine braking and skateboarding. Since trucks coming down Radio Hill must decelerate, it is likely that if the ordinance is enforced operators will claim this exception of an "emergency" and say they have no choice but to use compression brakes to be able to properly stop. On the skateboarding ordinance, it's currently written to where there can only be civil penalties, not criminal. We would need to revise that ordinance to be able to allow WJPD to enforce the ordinance. Downtown Trick or Treat will be held October 31st from 3:00 to 5:00pm. There was some vandalism to the park where two kids threw out several bags of flour at the picnic shelter. Video footage of the incident was shared with officers who were able to identify the juveniles

and charge them with the offence. The Christmas Tree 5K will take place December 7th. The Board thanked Brantley for his report.

Public Comments – Businesses owners, Lauren Darnell, Derek McClure, and Mike Leserra that own businesses on Highway 221 business spoke about the flooding that occurred along their businesses and requested assistance from NC DOT to correct the issues before another incident occurs. The business owners asked the board to be their voice and help them get the assistance needed. Alderman Barr informed the business owners that the town has plans to complete several stormwater projects. The businesses owners then questioned if the road could be cleaned up to avoid potential accidents. Town Manager Price agreed to clean up the road and would draft a letter to the NC DOT in support of the repairs for the Board to review at the next meeting.

Aldermen Comments – All the alderman showed appreciation to the town staff and community for working together in a time of tragedy cause by Hurricane Helene.

Closed Session – Alderman Barr made the motion to enter closed session. Alderman Shoemaker seconded the motion with a vote of 5-0. The time was 7:33pm.

Return to Regular Session – The Board returned to regular session.

Consideration of ABC Appointment – Alderman Shoemaker made the motion to nominate Joni Ray as the new ABC Board member. Alderman Reeves seconded the motion with a vote of 5-0 in favor.

Adjournment – With nothing further, Alderman Reeves made the motion to adjourn the regular meeting, seconded by Alderman Shoemaker with a vote of 5-0 in favor.

Tom Hartman, Mayor

Rebecca Eldreth, Town Clerk