

**TOWN OF BURGAW BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL MEETING – STRATEGIC THINKING RETREAT**

DATE: February 16-17, 2021
TIME: 9:00 AM and 2:00 PM
PLACE: Historic Train Depot
BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Kenneth Cowan
Mayor Pro-tem Wilfred Robbins
Commissioners Bill George, Jan Dawson and James Murphy
BOARD MEMBER ABSENT: Commissioner Vernon Harrell
STAFF PRESENT IN PERSON: James Gantt, Town Manager
Kristin J. Wells, Town Clerk
Kim Rivenbark, Deputy Town Clerk
Louis Hesse, Building Code Administrator
Cody Suggs, Parks & Recreation Director
Andrea Correll, Planning Director
Alan Moore, Public Works Director
Clay Jasper, Assistant Fire Chief
Jim Hock, Police Chief

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Cowan at 9:00 AM and the invocation was led by Commissioner George.

FY 21-22 Budget Discussion

Mr. Gantt made a presentation regarding the mission and vision of the town, as well as the goals and objectives of the Board of Commissioners. Mr. Gantt also reviewed the current budget year and the accomplishments of the town. After the presentation, Mr. Gantt asked the board to provide words regarding the mission and vision of the town. The following words and phrases were spoken during this discussion:

- Vibrant
- Active
- Peaceful
- Safe
- Business Opportunity
- Burgaw comes alive around 7 AM in the morning
- Proud of our town
- Since we are the county seat, we have responsibility
- Lots of people like Burgaw's atmosphere; we have trees and natural landscaping; it's not just sidewalks and buildings
- Destination town
- A lot of pride from the citizens

There were various discussions and comments about the town. Very little complaints come in to town staff on a day-to-day basis. There is a lot of community support.

Mr. Gantt spoke on the future of Burgaw. The board commented we need to finish capital projects and get it done. Commissioner Dawson said she wants to see growth, but wants it to be controlled growth. The following comments were made during the discussion of "where do you see Burgaw in 10 years:"

- Sleepy little town, but still vibrant
- Controlled growth
- Parks and recreation
- Working with the schools
- Aging community; Pender Adult Services needs assistance to expand services

There were comments made that Burgaw is in a state of transition, now more than ever, and is the type of place people want to find, but we need to control it. We need to think about the connectivity in town from east to west and provide walkability along Highway 53. Mr. Gantt said he would like to improve our pedestrian crossings, especially along Wilmington Street near the downtown area. Mayor Cowan said we could really spur growth if we market the town. Commissioner Robbins said there is something to be said for growth from within; there is a huge need and desire for apartments in the downtown area, town houses, senior living, etc.

Departmental Presentations on Capital Improvement Projects

Inspections Department – *Louis Hesse, Building Code Administrator*

Mr. Hesse reviewed the items pertaining to inspections, building, and grounds for town facilities. Items mentioned by Mr. Hesse were the replacement of the town hall roof, handicap accessibility in the Police Department, renovation of the EMS Building, and replacement of the dock boards at the depot.

There were comments about the renovation of the EMS Building. Commissioner George asked if the foundation and structure of the Fire Department is capable of housing a second story to accommodate expansion of town hall. Mr. Hesse said it was his understanding it was not capable of doing so.

Fire Department – *Clay Jasper, Deputy Fire Chief*

Deputy Chief Jasper reviewed the items pertaining to the Fire Department. *See attached Power Point Presentation.* Items mentioned by Deputy Chief Jasper were the replacement of Squad 15, replacement of the ladder truck, purchase of Deputy Chief vehicle, personal protective equipment replacement, radio replacements, bay door upgrades, air flow upgrades inside the bay, adding company officers, and increasing full time staff. Deputy Chief Jasper also reviewed statistics for calls, response times, etc. for the past few years.

There was discussion regarding radios and communication upgrades. Commissioner George requested the communication upgrades be taken care of as quickly as possible. Mr. Gantt said the current radios are working perfectly, but as long as we are phasing new ones in before 2025, we should have no issues.

BREAK 10:40 AM – 10:55 AM

Planning Department – *Andrea Correll, Planning Director*

Ms. Correll reviewed the items pertaining to the Planning Department. *See attached Power Point Presentation.* She said she can see conflicts in the future Land Use Plan; there needs to be a review of drainage, sewer, infrastructure, etc. Ms. Correll said it needs to be updated based on population increases. The current one is 2030 and needs to be updated to the 2040 version. Mr. Gantt said staff feels it is necessary to update the Land Use Plan to reflect the vision of the town. There were comments made about the future of the rail division.

Parks & Recreation Department – *Cody Suggs, Parks & Recreation Director*

Mr. Suggs reviewed the items pertaining to the Parks & Recreation Department. *See attached Power Point Presentation.* Mr. Suggs gave a brief review of what was accomplished over the past year. He said a set amount of money should be allotted each year for general maintenance of the Depot and Community House. Some items mentioned by Mr. Suggs were new banners around town, upgrades to the Harrell Park parking lot, installation of outdoor basketball and volleyball courts, updates to existing features at parks and facilities, upgrades to the incubator kitchen equipment, and assist the Planning Department with the Westside Trails expansion.

Commissioner Robbins asked about the possibility of placing a dog park at the Ashe Street park. Mr. Suggs said he believes this is a possibility and a lot of people had shown interest in a dog park on the recent surveys. Commissioner Robbins said a dog park would entice people to come into town from the interstate. Mr. Gantt said the Emergency Watershed Protection Program will address issues with the bank slopes through the Ashe Street Park. Once this has been done, Mr. Gantt feels like we can look into the dog park further at that time.

Mr. Suggs also spoke on the request of adding a full-time employee to the Parks & Recreation Department. He said this person would focus on special events, senior programs, facility rentals, and a liaison between the Parks & Recreation Department and the Tourism Development Authority.

Police Department – Jim Hock, Police Chief

Chief Hock reviewed items pertaining to the Police Department. *See attached Power Point Presentation.* Some of the short-term budget requests made by Chief Hock were vehicle replacements and radio replacements. Chief Hock also reviewed requested items in his long-term plan, which included firearm replacements, vest replacements, computer replacements, mobile radio replacements, and replacement of body worn cameras. Chief Hock also reviewed statistics for the past few years and spoke on the importance of an Emergency Operations Center and training room for the Police Department in a future expansion of town hall.

Public Works Department – Alan Moore, Director

Mr. Moore reviewed items pertaining to the Public Works Department that are listed in the CIP (attached). Some key items mentioned by Mr. Moore were upgrades to sewer manholes, upgrades at lift stations, utility infrastructure replacements, stand-alone generator at the Village on 18 lift station, upgrades to drainage areas, new force main on the west side of town, updates to the Public Works facilities, replacement of excavator, replacement of a dump truck, replacement of truck 81, purchase of a lift for festivals and décor, replacement of street sweeper, replacement of Kabota mower, SCADA upgrades, contract with a pre-treatment coordinator, street paving, and repaving of the walking trail.

Other Discussion

Commissioner George commented on the sewer manhole located on Cowan Street near Peggy Casey's property. He said there are several areas where the water flows from and the manhole is not capable of holding that much water. There was brief discussion regarding easements, etc. Mr. Gantt said he would speak with Attorney Rivenbark about this matter.

Commissioner Robbins said the portion of North Cowan Street between Highway 53 and Wallace Street needs to be top priority to be paved.

Commissioner George spoke about cleaning up a lot on North Cowan Street next to Peggy Casey's property. He said there is a dead tree on it that needs cleaning up.

Mayor Cowan commented on a plan to offer part-time employment to people that leave Public Works, so they can come back and assist when needed. Mayor Cowan said the knowledge of the people leaving is important.

Mayor Cowan also said a full-time grant writer is a critical position for the town. He said the town cannot fund everything that needs to be done.

MEETING RECESSED – 12:06 PM

Mayor Cowan recessed the meeting until 2:00 PM on February 17, 2021.

MEETING RECONVENED – February 17, 2021 at 2:04 PM

Mayor Cowan, Commissioners Dawson, Robbins, Murphy, and George were present. Commissioner Harrell was absent. James Gantt, Kristin Wells, Tiffany Byrd, and Wendy Pope were also present.

Mr. Gantt spoke about capital budgeting and the five phases: identification, capital planning, capital budgeting development and execution, capital financing, and asset management. Mr. Gantt presented the mission and vision statements for the town. The board agreed on the mission statement presented, but requested some of the wording be changed in the vision statement. Mr. Gantt will work on this and send back out to the board for thoughts.

There was discussion on how to get citizens involved, a healthcare system in town, education, etc.

Mr. Gantt asked the board to review the CIP list and determine the top five priorities for general fund and for the water/sewer fund.

Mayor Cowan commented on dollars spent on the renovation of the former EMS building. He said there are requests for expansion on Town Hall, so we need to get the 'biggest bang for our buck.' Commissioner Robbins said he believes Town Hall is more than accurate and there is enough office space; he does not see a need in expanding Town Hall.

Commissioner Dawson commented she thought the new street banners were going to be purchased in the current year budget. Mr. Gantt said that project was not budgeted. He said the TDA has also looked into helping the town financially with the purchase of new banners.

There was discussion regarding the mobile radios needing to be phased out over the next few years due to technology upgrades by year 2025.

Commissioner Robbins asked about the filming revenue currently being received. Mr. Gantt said he anticipates, when the filming is complete, the approximate total will be around \$100k. There was discussion regarding usage of the money received from filming. Commissioner Robbins said Public Works needs a lot things. He said it would be a good idea to use the money for the purchase of a new excavator. Commissioner Robbins said this equipment is used to help everyone in town.

Commissioner Robbins asked how much money is in the downtown revitalization fund. Mr. Gantt said there was \$100k in the account and was planning to use \$50k for the master plan of the Courthouse Avenue project, but received a grant so the \$50k stayed in the account. Mr. Gantt said there have been very minor expenses paid out of the account so far. Commissioner Robbins said the town needs to budget substantial money in a fund and allow WithersRavenel to get serious about grants. He said if we had been budgeting money over the years, we would have close to a million dollars in the account. Commissioner Robbins said he would like to see the current town board commit to allocating money for this project.

Mr. Gantt explained how the town funds capital projects. He said his top priority, and feels the board would think the same, would be storm drainage. Mr. Gantt said some towns have a storm water utility fee to fund capital projects such as improvements with storm water. He said this would be a fee added onto the utility bills to generate revenue for the town. Mr. Gantt reviewed this process with the board and there was much discussion on this matter. Commissioner Robbins commented on the possibility of a bond; he said he feels the citizens would not have a problem to vote for this to help with the drainage issues. Commissioner Robbins said we also have issues with our aging water and sewer pipes in town. He said it might be time the town does something big so these problems can be taken care of.

There was discussion regarding major drainage issues in town. Mr. Gantt said the top major priorities are I&I issues and storm drainage. He explained the storm water utility fee in depth and will bring back estimate revenue totals back to the board for discussion.

Mr. Gantt said he has already received notification that the garbage and recycling rates will be increasing this year. There was discussion about the possibility of discontinuing curb side recycling service. Mr. Gantt said he is supposed to meeting with the regional manager of GFL and will see how much the resident would save if we did away with curb side recycling. Commissioner Dawson and Robbins said if we were to remove the recycling fee and add on the storm water utility fee to the utility bills, this would be an 'easier pill to swallow' for residents.

Mr. Gantt spoke on asset management. He said he and Public Works staff are looking into bettering the asset management process for work orders related to water pipes, etc.

Mr. Gantt commented on electric vehicles. He said he has reached out to Enterprise and they are working on getting a quote for electric vehicles. Mr. Gantt said, based on research he has done, they range from around \$50k-60k. There was brief discussion on the concerns with the electric vehicles.

Mr. Gantt also spoke about the debt service the town has currently. He said the town has very little debt service and that some items will be coming off the budget this upcoming year. Ms. Pope said the last payment for the ladder truck is August 2021.

Ms. Pope said we need to look at increasing our water and sewer rates. Mr. Gantt explained the town's current rate structure.

Mr. Gantt said this strategic planning retreat was to really focus on the ten-year capital improvement plan to stagger items out so the town is not having to spend large amounts of money at one time. He said we have some catching up to do and we need to plan for the bigger expenditures. Mr. Gantt said he and Ms. Pope are working on ways to finance those items, but this will be something they work on after they have an idea on priorities from the board.

Commissioner Robbins reiterated his request to use the film money on the purchase of the excavator. He also said we could put a sign on the side of it showing it was paid for by the film industry, etc.

Mayor Cowan said he would like to see the department heads prioritize their budget items. Mr. Gantt said this would be done during the budgeting process.

Commissioners Robbins commented on the ladder truck and asked if it was used. Commissioner George said it has decreased insurance rates. Commissioner Dawson asked what we will do with the current ladder truck when it is time to be replaced. Mr. Gantt said it would be sold and the revenue generated from it would off set the cost of a new truck.

Commissioner Robbins also asked how much, realistically, could the town start putting into a fund to help with grants for the Courthouse Avenue project. There was discussion about funding and the project.

Commissioner Robbins asked about the status of the renovation of the former EMS building. He asked what the town needs to do to get this project started. Mr. Gantt said the bid was published and waiting for the closing date. He said he does not anticipate receiving any bids on the project. There was discussion regarding the renovation and options for moving forward. Mr. Gantt also showed a map of the land owned by the town in the area.

Commissioner Robbins commented on the Public Works facilities. He said they need updated restroom facilities, etc. Mr. Gantt said he recently met with Mr. Moore and he is supposed to be coming up with a plan of upgrades, etc.

Commissioner Robbins also commented on the sight of the old vehicles behind the Public Works garage. Mr. Gantt said those vehicles were impounded in years past and Chief Hock has recently been working with the district attorney's office regarding the cases. Commissioner Robbins requested staff take an inventory and meet with the district attorney.

There was discussion about the Lion's Club building located on Smith Street behind the Public Works facilities.

There were comments made about loud vehicles driving through town. Mr. Gantt said the ordinance mentions a noise ordinance but there is no penalty included. Ms. Correll has been looking at this recently and will bring something back for the board to consider.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Robbins made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Dawson and carried by unanimous vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:05 PM.

Attest:_____

Kristin J. Wells, Town Clerk

Kenneth T. Cowan, Mayor