

Regular Meeting – April 15, 2025

The Fairmont Board of Commissioners held their regular meeting on Tuesday, April 15, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. in the Fairmont-South Robeson Heritage Center with Mayor Charles Kemp presiding. Commissioners present were Clarence McNeill, Jr., Terry Evans, Heather Seibles, Melvin Ellison and J.J. McCree. Commissioner Jan Tedder-Rogers was absent. Staff present included Town Manager Jerome Chestnut, Town Clerk Jenny Larson, Deputy Town Clerk Rodney Cain, Lead for NC Fellow Madison Johns, and Public Works Director Ronnie Seals. Others in attendance included Henry Bernacki, Lauren Blackburn, Brice Bell, Mark Lacy, and several citizens.

Call to Order and Invocation

Mayor Charles Kemp called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m. Town Manager Jerome Chestnut gave the invitation which was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Presentations

Proclamation and Presentation – Municipal Clerk’s Week May 4-10, 2025

Mayor Kemp read a proclamation in honor of the 56th annual Municipal Clerk’s Week May 4-10, 2025 and gave certificates to Town Clerk Jenny Larson and Deputy Town Clerk Rodney Cain. A signed copy of this proclamation is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of these minutes.

Approval of Agenda

Commissioner Seibles made a motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Evans seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Public Comment Period/Citizens Appearance

Henry Bernacki

Mr. Henry Bernacki thanked the town’s hardworking staff and appreciates the efforts to take care of water and drainage issues.

Consent Agenda

Upon motion by Commissioner Ellison and seconded by Commissioner Evans, it was unanimously voted to adopt the following consent agenda items:

- a. Approval of Minutes – Regular Meeting, March 18, 2025.
- b. Approval of FY 25-26 Budget Workshop Schedule
- c. Resolution 25-02 – Water System Rehabilitation Project Grant Application
- d. Resolution 25-03 – Accepting Water/Sewer AIA Results

Signed copies of the resolutions are hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of these minutes.

Old Business

There was no old business this month.

New Business

Robeson County Safety Action Plan presented by VHB Engineering

Lauren Blackburn from VHB Engineering and NCDOT Representative Brice Bell spoke about the Robeson County Roadway Safety Action Plan. The goals for the plan include:

- Develop a plan to reduce fatalities and serious injury crashes by half by 2035
- Increase awareness of transportation safety and manage speeds and high-risk behaviors
- Identify needs and implement safety improvements like roundabouts and all way stops

Water/Sewer Asset Management Plan presented by LKC Engineers

Mark Lacy, from LKC Engineering, gave a summary of the Water and Wastewater Asset Management Plans. The project was funded by NCDEQ in collaboration with the Lumber River Council of Governments. The key takeaways are:

Wastewater System:

- Infiltration and inflow (I/I) in the collection system are excessive. Flow reduction is necessary to prevent overflows, backups into homes in low lying areas, and costly pumping and force main improvements
- WWTP mechanical components are nearing the end of their useful life and rehabilitation will be needed soon to ensure reliable function.
- Excessive grit has built up in the influent channel and aeration basin #2 and needs to be removed to avoid aeration system failures and operational impacts.
- Most of the collection system is at the end of its useful life and widespread rehabilitation and replacement is needed.
- Improvements are needed to accurately meter flow from bulk users.
- The existing rate structure will not provide sufficient income to support adequate system maintenance and capital improvement needs.
- Capital Improvement Plan costs for the next 5 years are estimated at \$18,535,589.

Drinking Water System:

- Most of the water mains are nearing the end of their useful life and are likely impacting system performance and contributing to overall water loss.
- The supply wells and associated ground tanks need rehabilitation and maintenance to avoid the need for extensive repair or replacement.
- The system is losing almost half its water supply every year to miscellaneous sources.
- System revenues have not met operating expenses in recent years, and increases to user rates are recommended as noted in the EFC rate analysis.
- Capital Improvement Plan costs for the next 5 years are estimated at \$13,480,000.

Commissioner Evans made a motion to adopt the Water and Wastewater Asset Management Plans. Commissioner Ellison seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Regional Utilities Discussion

Town Manager Jerome Chestnut stated the Town of Fairmont currently serves as a Regional Provider of Wastewater Services for the towns of Fairmont, Proctorville, Boardman, Cerro Gordo, and Fair Bluff. The current method of operation is not sustainable and a new authority or agreement with the towns needs to be reached. Over the past year, every system has been studied, and Asset Management Plans have been completed. Entities taking part in this study have been members of each town's boards, the LRCOG, UNC SOG, UNC Environmental Finance Center, the NCLM, and NCDEQ. All towns currently own the assets of their water and sewer system. Whichever direction Fairmont leads, authority or amending current agreements, collaboration must take between all the towns for a way forward.

The Official Response from the Town of Boardman from their April's meeting is:

1. Their first preference is a regional authority. The system being owned and operated by Fairmont is their second preference.
2. If a regional agreement is reached - Boardman will only sign up when there is a guarantee that the rates in the five towns will all be the same.
3. If a regional agreement is reached - Boardman will only sign up if the ability to tap on to the water and/or sewer systems is non-mandatory.

The Council is aware that rates will have to be increased, and they will have to explain that to their customers. Their best explanation would be that all five towns are paying the same and will always pay the same. Currently in Boardman, structures can go on private wells or septic tanks, or they can connect to the municipal utility system. The Council wants to make sure that ability remains the same. The towns of Proctorville, Cerro Gordo, and Fair Bluff will discuss it at their May meetings.

Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Evans thanked the staff for putting together the annual Easter Egg Hunt. Commissioner Ellison has concerns about the condition of Pine Street.

Mayor Comments

Mayor Kemp reminded everyone of the 81st Job Fair/Career Expo to be held Wednesday, April 16 from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. in the Heritage Center.

Mayor Kemp invited the community to the quarterly Town Talk meeting on Tuesday, April 29 at 6:00 p.m. in the Heritage Center. The purpose of the meeting is to educate the public on town operations.

Manager Comments

Town Manager Chestnut encouraged citizens to attend the budget workshops, stay engaged, and be part of the solution to the town's issues.

Announcements

Wednesday, April 16 – Job Fair/Career Expo, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Heritage Center.

Friday, April 18 and Monday, April 21 – Town offices closed for Easter.

Tuesday, April 29 – Town Talk, 6:00 p.m., Heritage Center.

Thursday, May 1 – Fairmont Planning Board, 6:00 p.m., Town Hall.

Saturday, May 3 – May Day Fun Festival, Downtown Fairmont

Saturday, May 10 – Senior Bingo, 12:00 to 2:00 p.m., Heritage Center.

Tuesday, May 20 – Regular Town Board Meeting, 6:00 p.m., Heritage Center.

Monday, May 26 – Memorial Day Ceremony, 12:00 noon, Heritage Center.

Monday, May 26 – Town offices closed for Memorial Day.

Tuesday, May 27 – Budget Workshop, 6:00 p.m., Heritage Center.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Commissioner Evans made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:11 p.m. Commissioner Seibles seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

Jennifer H. Larson
Town Clerk