

TOWN OF RICHLANDS
NORTH CAROLINA

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The Richlands Board of Aldermen met in Regular Session on June 10, 2025, at 6:00 pm at the Richlands Town Hall. Present for the meeting were:

Mayor McKinley Smith
Mayor Pro-Tem Tom Brown
Alderman Kent Painter

Alderman Marilyn Bunce
Alderman Kandy Koonce

Absent: Alderman Paul Conner

Also present were:

Gregg Whitehead, Town Administrator
Erin Juhls, Town Clerk
William A. Horne, Chief of Police

Keith Fountain, Town Attorney
Johnathan Jarman, Public Works Director
Donnie Stiles, Code Enforcement Officer

There were 7 citizens present.

I. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER:

Mayor McKinley Smith called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Alderman Tom Brown

III. INVOCATION: Mayor McKinley Smith

IV. ADOPTION OF AGENDA:

Gregg Whitehead, Town Administrator, presented the agenda to the Board.

A **motion** was made by Alderman Kandy Koonce seconded by Alderman Tom Brown to adopt the agenda as presented. The motion was unanimously carried.

V. ADOPTION OF MINUTES (May 13, 2025):

A **motion** was made by Alderman Tom Brown, seconded by Alderman Kandy Koonce to approve the meeting minutes of May 13, 2025. The motion was unanimously carried.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT:

William Spencer spoke regarding a letter he sent to the District Attorney, Mayor, Town Administrator, and Chief that was in reference to his concerns of enforcements of G.S. 20-128.

He also urged the Board to address speeding on 258 and its enforcement. He asked the board to act as a collective and to come up with a solution for the citizens of the town.

Greg Pittman informed the board that until June 2nd when he was handed a F-5 for separation, he had been with the Richlands Police Department since 2014. He was a reserve officer for 10 years and 7 months and understood that the position did not get paid. He worked shifts whenever he was asked and always came out when there was a wrecker call to check on the officers. Ever since the town agreed to pay Onslow County deputies to cover the town when needed, he has not been asked to cover a shift. Recently, he requested to be paid to cover shifts when the town was going to be short staffed and was denied. He then turned in his credentials and badge. He would like an explanation on why he was never offered to be paid for working a shift when the town pays Onslow County Deputies, pays Officer Mace, and pays officer's overtime.

Elizabeth Bertuch spoke regarding the proposed closed session on the agenda. She does not understand how real estate transactions can be private, and it feels underhanded and builds mistrust in the community even if it is allowed by the law. It makes her feel like the board is entertaining proposals that the community would not agree with.

Also voiced her concerns after listening to the previous public comments on what authority the board has to enact change and what role the board has in the town.

Bernard Meleod expressed that he gives his full vote of confidence to the board and all the members. He also updated the Board on the hotel and stated he is hoping that they will be fully entitled within the next 30 days.

VII. PUBLIC HEARING: None

VIII. OLD BUSINESS: None

IX. NEW BUSINESS:

1. FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026 BUDGET PRESENTATION:

Town Administrator Gregg Whitehead presented the proposed fiscal year 2025-2026 budget and noted that a public hearing will need to be scheduled, and a budget ordinance adopted prior to July 1, 2025. He stated that the budget includes what was discussed at the budget workshop in April. He also highlighted the following:

- Total proposed budget is \$2,127,600.00.
- No tax rate or fee changes.
- 5% COLA for all employees.
- \$13,500.00 is being appropriated from fund balance.

- Will be purchasing vehicles for the Police Department and the Public Works Department with a 3-year installment purchase contract.
- Health insurance costs will be increasing approximately 1.5%.

A **motion** was made by Alderman Marilyn Bunce, seconded by Alderman Kandy Koonce to schedule a public hearing for June 23rd at 5:00 p.m. The motion was unanimously carried.

2. **ONWASA ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE AGREEMENT:**

Town Administrator Gregg Whithead presented 2025-2026 Administrative Services Agreement between ONWASA and the Town of Richlands and provides for the continuing operation of the satellite office located at town hall. The agreement is identical to the one approved last year and does not change the fee or any requirement previously established in proper agreements.

A **motion** was made by Alderman Tom Brown, seconded by Alderman Marilyn Bunce to approve the 2025-2026 Administrative Services Agreement between ONWASA and the Town of Richlands. The motion was unanimously approved.

3. **RVFD SERVICE CONTRACT UPDATE:**

After consulting with the Richlands Volunteer Fire Department, Town Administrator Gregg Whitehead modified the service contract initially approved on March 11,20225. Language has been inserted into Section 5.3 that further clarifies the continuation of the lease of the building and grounds located at Wilmington Street to the RVFD by including the utilization of a satellite station.

A **motion** was made by Alderman Kent Painter, seconded by Alderman Kandy Koonce to approve the amended contract. The motion was unanimously carried.

4. **OVERFLOW CAFÉ NC REQUEST:**

Overflow Café NC, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that helps the Blessing Shed food pantry located at 111 Kinston Hwy in Richlands has requested some or all of the rental fee be waived for the use of the Richlands Community Building in order to hold a fundraising dinner on December 20,2025.

A **motion** was made by Alderman Marilyn Bunce, seconded by Alderman Tom Brown to approve the use at no charge. The motion unanimously carried.

5. **RICHLANDS PLANNING BOARD REAPPOINTMENT:**

The Planning Board term for Ms. Melissa Kepes (200 N Wilmington St) will expire on June 14, 2025. Ms. Kepes has expressed her desire to be reappointed. If the Board of Alderman reappoints Ms. Kepes, the new term will be for three years.

A **motion** was made by Alderman Tom Brown, seconded by Alderman Kent Painter to reappoint Ms. Melissa Kepes. The motion was unanimously carried.

X. **ADMINISTRATOR NOTES AND UPDATES:**

The Town Administrator, Gregg Whitehead, presented a copy of notes and updates to the Board which is incorporated by reference and hereby made part of these minutes. He also reported on the following:

- Ms. Sebrina Pierce's last day will be Wednesday. She is getting married and moving out of state. Ms. Patricia Allen will be taking her place.
- Introduced Mr. Donnie Stiles who has now taken over the Code Enforcement Officer position.
- The new election cycle starts July 7th and ends on July 18th.
- Presented a Venters park rendering to include a restroom and pavilion which will be completed by the end of 2026.

XI. POLICE REPORT:

Chief William A. Horne presented a copy of the Activity Report for May 2025 and is incorporated by reference and hereby made part of these minutes. He also reported on the following:

- Officer Pool attended Governor's Highway Safety Program events in Jacksonville and Swansboro.
- The new trainee started BLET on June 2nd.
- The in car cameras that were installed in the Durango's are now set up to automatically download.

XII. BOARD MEMBER CONCERNS AND COMMITTEE UPDATES:

Alderman Marilyn Bunce: Would like to propose a discussion at the next board meeting so the public can be involved and have some input regarding lowering the speed limit to 35 mph on Highway 258 in the city limits.

Inquired with Public Works Director Johnathan Jarman regarding how often the town sprays for mosquitoes. Mr. Jarman stated the town can spray up to 15,000 acres a year without a permit. Once that threshold is met, the town can pay Onslow County to come in and spray. After a discussion, the board agreed that they would like the town to begin spraying once a week until the threshold is met.

Informed everyone that she does not have a subdivision progress report from the County but once it is updated and received, she will forward it to the board.

Wanted to make everyone aware of the upcoming elections which are run by the county. Anyone who lives in the city limits can run for office and the filing begins July 7th and ends July 18th.

Alderman Tom Brown: Requested a copy of the letter from Mr. William Spencer. Also expressed that tickets need to be written for the illegal exhaust systems.

Alderman Kent Painter: Requested an update on the street improvements. Town Administrator Gregg Whitehead explained that the CPA has been speaking with USDA regarding what is needed for financials and just received the information yesterday.

Also, expressed the need to address the noise complaints on trucks and writing tickets.

Town Attorney Keith Fountain: Addressed two items:

- 1) The speed limit on US 258 is set by the State of North Carolina and the town has no right to set that limit.
- 2) Spoke regarding closed sessions and stated that it is very hard for the town to negotiate to buy property if the seller is sitting in the meeting while it is being discussed. Once a contract is entered it is subject to being approved by the board in an open session. If it is a sale of property, it must be public. There are additional reasons for closed session including discussing personnel issues because of the privacy act.

Mayor McKinley Smith: Thanked the town attorney for explaining closed sessions and thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

XIII. PERSONNEL: None

XIV. CLOSED SESSION:

A **motion** was made by Alderman Marilyn Bunce, seconded by Alderman Tom Brown to go into closed session to discuss a proposed acquisition of Real Property and the performance of an employee. The motion was unanimously carried.

Mayor McKinley Smith called the meeting back to order.

There was a discussion regarding personnel and the possible acquisition of real property. No action was taken.

XV. ADJOURN:

With no further business, a **motion** was made by Alderman Kandy Koonce seconded by Alderman Tom Brown to adjourn the meeting at 7:21 pm. The motion was unanimously carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mayor McKinley Smith

Attest:
Erin Juhls, Town Clerk