

TOWN OF RICHLANDS
NORTH CAROLINA

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The Richlands Board of Aldermen met in Regular Session on November 18, 2025, at 6:00 pm at the Richlands Town Hall. Present for the meeting were:

Mayor McKinley Smith
Alderman Paul Conner
Alderman Kandy Koonce

Alderman Tom Brown
Alderman Kent Painter

Absent: Alderman Marilyn Bunce

Also present were:

Gregg Whitehead, Town Administrator
Erin Juhls, Town Clerk
Isaura Flores

Keith Fountain, Town Attorney
Johnathan Jarman, Public Works Director

There were 6 citizens present.

I. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER:

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

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Alderman Kent Painter

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

V. ADOPTION OF MINUTES (OCTOBER, 2025):

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

A **motion** was then made by Alderman Paul Conner, seconded by Alderman Kandy Koonce to approve the Special Call and Closed Session meeting minutes as redacted and changed and for the personnel portion of the closed session minutes to remain sealed. The motion was unanimously carried.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Billy Spencer congratulated the Board for being reelected along with Ms. Alice Betts. Appreciates all the Board does and showed his appreciation for the Christmas Tree event over the weekend.

As a citizen of Richlands, he does not know who sets the agenda for the coming year but has spoken with Chief Horne recently and would like the Board to make it a priority for the Police Department to get whatever they need in order to perform their duties.

VII. PUBLIC HEARING:

1. SUBDIVISION & ZONING TEXT AMENDMENTS:

Mayor Smith opened the public hearing in order to receive public comments regarding the Subdivision and Zoning Text Amendments.

The proposed text amendments are under Chapter 153 (Zoning) and Chapter 152 (Subdivisions) of the Town of Richlands Code of Ordinances.

Mr. Whitehead explained that the amendments include two changes that have been discussed in length in prior meetings. Currently the subdivision regulations do not have a threshold that gives the board any direction on when to take over streets. The proposed changes would state that 90% of a given subdivision must be completed before the Board authorizes any street acceptance. Language has also been removed to clarify that streets are to be designed to NCDOT specifications, not the town as required by House Bill 926.

The proposed changes on the zoning text amendments update the swimming pool regulations by deleting the entire section and replacing it with language direct from the state building code regarding outdoor swimming pools which includes definitive definitions on terms including fencing, barriers, etc.

With no comments, Mayor Smith declared the public hearing closed.

2. VOLUNTARY ANNEXATION (CAROLINA SAPPHIRE):

Mayor Smith opened the public hearing in order to receive public comments regarding the voluntary annexation petition by Carolina Sapphire, LLC.

The proposed annexation would include 76.66 acres of property identified as Onslow County Tax Parcel ID 017879 and 49.98 acres of property identified as Onslow County Tax Parcel ID #017942 owned by Carolina Sapphire, LLC.

With no comments, Mayor Smith declared the public hearing closed.

3. VOLUNTARY ANNEXATION (PRIMARY LAND DEVELOPMENT):

Mayor Smith opened the public hearing in order to receive public comments regarding the voluntary annexation petition by Primary Land Development.

The proposed annexation would include 67.726 acres of property identified as Onslow County Tax Parce ID 017914 owned by Primary Land Development, LLC.

With no comments, Mayor Smith declared the public hearing closed.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS:

IX. NEW BUSINESS:

1. OATH OF OFFICE:

Current Town Clerk/Finance Officer Erin Juhls administered the Oath of Office to incoming Town Clerk/Finance Officer Isaura Flores.

2. PROCLAMATION (NATIONAL HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE CARE MONTH):

Town administrator Gregg Whitehead presented a Proclamation declaring November 2025 as National Hospice and Palliative Care Month to Michelle Bennett with Lower Cape Fear Lifecare, a nonprofit hospice and palliative care organization serving patients and families in Richlands and surrounding areas.

Ms. Bennet thanked the Board and noted that Lower Cape Fear Lifecare serves all of Onslow County and was rated as a five-star hospice. If anyone would like more information, they can go to the website www.lifecare.org or contact her directly.

3. VOLUNTARY ANNEXATION ORDINANCE (CAROLINA SAPPHIRE, LLC):

Since the required public hearing has been held, Town Administrator Gregg Whitehead Presented Ordinance 2025-11 which would provide for the voluntary annexation of approximately 126.64 acres of non-contiguous land located along Francktown Road and Life Boulevard.

A **motion** was made by Alderman Tom Brown, seconded by Alderman Kandy Koonce to approve Ordinance 2025-11. The motion was unanimously carried.

4. ANNEXATION PETITION (PRIMARY LAND DEVELOPMENT):

Since the required public hearing has been held, Town Administrator Gregg Whitehead presented Ordinance 2025-12 which would provide for the voluntary annexation of approximately 67.726 acres of contiguous land located along Gum Branch Road.

A **motion** was made by Alderman Tom Brown, seconded by Alderman Kandy Koonce to approve Ordinance 2025-12. The motion was unanimously carried.

5. SUBDIVISION AND ZONING TEXT AMENDMENTS:

Since the appropriate public hearings have been held, Town Administrator Gregg Whitehead presented Ordinance 2025-09 and Ordinance 2025-10.

Ordinance 2025-09 will add language to the subdivision regulations that provide guidance as to when the Board of Alderman will accept streets by stating that 90% of a given subdivision must be completed before the Board will authorize street acceptance. Language has also been removed to clarify that streets are to be designed to NCDOT specification, not the town, as required by House Bill 926.

Ordinance 2025-10 completely updated the swimming pool regulations by deleting the entire section and replacing it with language directly from the state building code regarding outdoor swimming pools.

A **motion** was made by Alderman Paul Conner, seconded by Alderman Kent Painter to approve Ordinance 2025-09 and Ordinance 2025-10 as presented. The motion was unanimously carried.

6. SUBDIVISION MAP APPROVAL (FARROW PROPERTY):

Town Administrator Gregg Whitehead presented a subdivision map which would create two residential lots out of Mr. Ernest Farrow's property at East Point Street. Since the proposed subdivision creates an easement, it will require the Board to approve the subdivision per the town's subdivision regulations.

A **motion** was made by Alderman Paul Conner, seconded by Alderman Tom Brown to approve the subdivision map. The motion was unanimously carried.

7. BUDGET AMENDMENT # 9 (FIRE SERVICE TAX) AND BUDGET AMENDMENT #10 (VENTERS PARK DESIGN):

Town Administrator Gregg Whitehead presented Budget Amendments #9 and #10. Budget Amendment #9 will account for the \$2,064.92 in additional revenues received from the county fire tax distribution for FY 25/26. Budget Amendment #10 will account for the \$6,500.00 in engineering and design fees for Venters Park restroom and stage facilities.

A **motion** was made by Alderman Tom Brown, seconded by Alderman Kent Painter to approve Budget Amendment #9 and #10. The motion was unanimously carried.

8. STORMWATER PROJECT:

Public Works Director Johnathan Jarman has identified a storm water project that affects multiple properties on West Foy Street and runs from Rand Street to Railroad Street intersection and needs Board consideration. The project will involve replacing and up-sizing culverts along sections of West Foy Street and Railroad Street and possibly needing easements to reconstruct ditches behind several properties on West Foy that feed into the Railroad Street drainage system. Mr. Jarman asked the Board to consider initiating preliminary engineering services in order to determine the best course of action.

Depending on the amount of work needed, the project can reach \$248,000.00 in construction costs alone. Engineering and administrative costs will be additional. Initial survey work will allow the town to know if considerable cost savings can be achieved by avoiding having to procure easements and new ditch work off the right-of-way. Mr. Whitehead presented a simplified snapshot map of the proposed project which is incorporated by reference and hereby made part of these minutes.

Public Works Director Johnathan Jarman addressed the Board and reported that he has spoken with the engineers who are hopeful the required work will be minimal and not overly costly. He noted that the Town should be able to use Powell Bill Funds for the project and recommended beginning with items 3–7, which include delineation of existing wetlands, if required a US COE Permit, surveying, preparation of easement maps, and engineering design which should total about \$40,000.00. He brought this to the Board’s attention now in consideration of the upcoming street improvement project, stating that he would not want to see a newly paved street dug up to complete this work.

A **motion** was made by Alderman Paul Conner, seconded by Alderman Tom Brown to give Johnathan Jarman discretion to move forward with the Foy Street storm water project and to initiate items 3-7 on the outline. 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:

- December 17th at 12:00 pm will be the Christmas Luncheon at town hall.
- The Town will be observing the Christmas holidays on December 25th and 26th. As in previous years, the employees would like to request one additional day, to be taken on Wednesday as a voluntary vacation day. The Board agreed on the extra voluntary vacation day to be taken on December 24th.
- The CopyPro contract is nearing expiration, and the proposed renewal price was not acceptable. A review of state contract pricing identified Systel as an option at \$13.00 less per month, with no separate lease agreement as currently required under CopyPro. The proposed Systel contract would be for a five-year term.

A **motion** was then made by Alderman Kent Painter, seconded by Alderman Tom Brown to authorize Mr. Whitehead to sign the contract with Systel. The motion was unanimously carried.

- With the HELP Building now sold, a discussion was held with Elliot Jarman of the Richlands Volunteer Fire Department regarding a lump-sum payment for the land purchased beside Town Hall, in lieu of continuing the annual payments. The Fire Department agreed to accept a lump-sum payment. A budget amendment will likely be presented to the Board in the future to satisfy the remaining balance of the purchase, with the remaining proceeds to be placed into the Capital Management Trust Fund.
- Town Clerk Erin Juhls will be leaving the town next week after almost 16 years with the town. We will all miss her and are thankful for everything she has done. We all wish her the best.
- This is the last meeting he will serve as Town Administrator before Mr. Chris Roberson takes over. It has been a long and wild ride, and he never expected to

remain in one position for so long. In this profession, it is uncommon for a manager to stay in the same role, even when they wish to. He feels it says a lot about the community that they have allowed him to stay this long and thanked everyone for the opportunity.

XI. POLICE REPORT:

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

- Dec 6th is the reindeer run for the Outlook Café and have contacted the Fire Department about helping with traffic control.
- The route for the Christmas Parade has changed and have reached out to other departments in the county for help with traffic control.
- Firearms qualifications have finished.
- The speed limits have officially changed on Franck, Wilmington, and Hargett Streets. The sign going east on Franck is correct but the sign going west is not. Public Works Director Johnathan Jarman is going to be contacting Department of Transportation tomorrow.
- Had a company reach out to the department regarding cameras and door locks. It is an internet-based cloud system and the technology and resolution are amazing. Lieutenant Nailer has reached out to them to see about getting a quote.
- The new Durango has been upfitted, just waiting on the stickers.
- The new hire coming from Jacksonville Police Department starts on Friday.

XII. BOARD MEMBER CONCERNS AND COMMITTEE UPDATES:

Alderman Paul Conner: Expressed his appreciation for Mr. Whithead and thanked him for all he has done. Also thanked Ms. Juhls for everything and wished both Mr. Whitehead and Ms. Juhls the best.

Thanked everyone for attending the meeting and also thanked Ms. Bennet with the Lower Cape Fear LifeCare for being present and expressed what an amazing service hospice provides.

Alderman Kandy Koonce: Thanked Mr. Whitehead and expressed how he was instrumental in allowing her to have her shop at her house. He has been a big part of the community and has done so much for people that not a lot of people know about.

Also thanked Ms. Juhls for all she has done and will miss Mr. Whitehead and Ms. Juhls. Recognized Ms. Alice Betts as her replacement on the Board and thanked her for stepping up.

Alderman Tom Brown: Inquired about installing flags on the speed limit signs that have changed as well as displaying the new speed limit information on the electronic board at town hall.

He also expressed his appreciation for Mr. Whitehead and all the work he has done for the town over the years. It has been a pleasure working with him and while he hates to see him leave, he wishes him all the best and noted that his successor has big shoes to fill.

Alderman Kent Painter: Inquired about the speed limit signs being fixed. Thanked Mr. Whitehead for all he has done and agreed with everything Alderman Brown said. Also thanked Ms. Juhls for all she has done.

Mayor McKinley Smith: Mr. Whitehead has been the best thing that could happen to Richlands. He has been a great leader for the town and is thankful Mayor Trott was able to get him from the Town of Beulaville. When he began with the town the population was 923, and under his leadership it grew to over 2,500. He has a wonderful attitude in all that he does and appreciates him. The town will miss him, and the next person cannot walk in his shoes but will have to build his own reputation. The town is losing a jewel.

Town Attorney Keith Fountain: It has been an honor to work with the town. He stated he has worked with other towns and promises it is a world of difference. Mr. Whitehead has always handled everything, he meets with people, and he explains things to them and people understand him. They all respect him and not because of his position but because of the man. He has done a great job.

He also thanked Ms. Juhls and expressed how she has made things easy for him.

Ms. Alice Betts: Shared how Mr. Whitehead has always returned her calls, always been polite and has always been a great communicator. She wished him success in whatever he decides to do.

XIII. PERSONNEL: None

XIV. CLOSED SESSION:

A **motion** was made by Alderman Kandy Koonce, seconded by Alderman Paul Conner to enter into closed session to discuss the conditions of initial employment and to have an attorney client privilege discussion. The motion was unanimously carried.

A **motion** was made by Alderman Paul Conner, seconded by Alderman Kent Painter to go back into open session. The motion was unanimously carried.

Mayor Smith called the meeting back to order.

No action was taken in closed session, a personnel matter and an attorney client matter were discussed.

A **motion** was then made by Alderman Tom Brown, seconded by Alderman Paul Conner to approve the employment agreement for Mr. Ronnie Chris Roberson. The motion was unanimously approved.

XV. ADJOURN:

With no further business, a **motion** was made by Alderman Kandy Koonce seconded by Alderman Paul Conner to adjourn the meeting at 7:06 pm. The motion was unanimously carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mayor McKinley Smith

Attest:

Isaura Flores, Town Clerk