

Zebulon Board of Commissioners
Work Session
Minutes
May 5, 2025

Present: Glenn L. York-Mayor, Jessica Harrison-Mayor Pro Tem, Beverly Clark-Commissioner, Amber Davis-Commissioner, Shannon Baxter-Commissioner, Quentin Miles-Commissioner, Taiwo Jaiyeoba-Interim Town Manager, Lisa Markland-Interim Town Clerk, Chris Medina-Planning, Tonya Easterwood-IT, Shannon Johnson-Economic Development, Tim Owens-Public Works, Bob Grossman-Police, Chris Perry-Fire, Sheila Long-Parks & Recreation, Samuel A. Slater-Attorney.

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

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Pro Tem Harrison led the pledge of allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Pro Tem Harrison made a motion, second by Commissioner Baxter. There was no discussion, and the motion passed unanimously.

SCHOOL RECOGNITIONS

A. East Wake High School

Mayor York recognized East Wake High School student Kai King and teacher Christopher Torr.

B. Proclamations

The Town of Zebulon, led by Commissioner Baxter, officially recognized the Zebulon Gifted and Talented Magnet Middle School Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) students for their outstanding achievements at the North Carolina FCCLA State Conference.

The Town of Zebulon, led by Commissioner Baxter, officially recognizes the Zebulon Gifted and Talented Magnet Middle School Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) students for their top two achievements at the North Carolina HOSA State Conference

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mayor York reminded those who spoke that there was a time limit of 15 minutes, allowing each speaker 3 minutes, speakers were not permitted to discuss public hearing items or matters requiring a closed session, nor could they speak more than once or yield their time to others.

Jennifer Acevedo-Holmes, Weaver's Pond resident, CEO of C3 nonprofit, urged the Town of Zebulon to support inclusive, community-driven initiatives aligned with its strategic plans. She highlighted successful collaboration during Spring Fest and requested the to approve and support

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Zebulon's first Latino Festival, with town partnership, event fee waivers, logistical support, and a clear review timeline. She emphasized that the community sought partnership, not charity, and was already doing the work outlined in the town's vision.

Emilio Reyes, Community Leader in East Wake, shared his passion for soccer and desire to promote the sport locally. He respectfully requested access to town fields, emphasizing his long-standing love for Zebulon and its people.

Robert Terry, 10608 Staghound Trail, thanked the Town of Zebulon, particularly the planning staff, planning board, and citizens, for their support and collaboration with the Gateway Zebulon Project. He praised the Town staff's responsiveness and the planning board's unanimous recommendation. He expressed gratitude for community advocacy and conveyed eagerness to move the project forward with the board's approval.

Cindy Mallard, 900 N. Church Street, spoke in support of the *Clean Slate* petition. She explained she signed it after thoughtful consideration to ensure her voice and others could be heard. She mentioned her concerns were not personal but focused on issues such as slow or absent decision-making, lack of policy adherence, staff not being heard, and the resulting financial and emotional toll. She also acknowledged and thanked town employees for their visible, consistent efforts, agreeing with the Mayor's statement that Zebulon was open for business.

Robin Hasslen, 808 N. Church Street, expressed concern over unresolved issues within the Town government, referring to them as the "elephant in the room." She referred to the *Clean Slate* petition as a community effort to confront these issues. As a retired university professor who taught critical race theory, she emphasized her commitment to truth and transparency. After speaking with former town staff members, Mr. Todd and Ms. Williams, following their resignations, she believed harm was done by some members of the Board of Commissioners and staff. She pledged to pursue justice and support a collaborative, functional local government.

Scott Carpenter, a Zebulon resident, introduced the Zebulon Citizens Advisory Partnership (ZCAP), a citizen-led, non-political group focused on open dialogue and collaborative problem-solving. He mentioned ZCAP had already engaged with town departments, including police and planning, and discussed topics like public safety, code enforcement, and the budget. He thanked officials and staff for their support and encouraged all residents to attend the May 20th meeting to raise issues and work together on solutions.

CONSENT

Mayor Pro Tem Harrison made a motion, second by Commissioner Clark to approve the consent agenda (which included the following):

A. Finance

- i. Wake County Tax Report – December 2024
- ii. Wake County Tax Report – January 2025
- iii. Wake County Tax Report – February 2025
- iv. Audit Contract

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B. Public Works

- i. Ordinance 2025-26 – Budget Amendment

C. Fire

- i. Resolution 2025-11 – Adoption of Wake County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan

There was no discussion, and the motion passed unanimously.

PRESENTATIONS

Interim Manager Jaiyeoba opened the presentation with an overview of the accelerated budget process for fiscal year 2025 - 2026, noting that due to the April 17th start date and the state-mandated adoption deadline in June, the town must complete in two months what typically takes six. He mentioned, unlike in prior years, each department will present both operating and capital budgets together, beginning with Information Technology, Economic Development, and Public Works that evening. Additional departments will follow in the coming work sessions, with a combined draft budget presentation scheduled for May 20th. He mentioned a public hearing was set for June 2nd, and a proposed budget retreat was to be held on June 7th to allow for deeper discussion. He emphasized the importance of community engagement, noting that a recent Facebook post about the budget had reached approximately 4,400 residents. He commented that to build on that input, an open house was tentatively scheduled for June 14th to allow more residents to participate and ask questions.

Tai also introduced consultant David Hill, who presented findings from the town's compensation study, commissioned as part of the FY24–25 budge, to ensure Zebulon remains competitive as an employer and to support employee morale. He mentioned the recommendations from the study will be incorporated into upcoming budget presentations.

Board members were asked to treat the departmental presentations as listening sessions, encouraged clarifying questions and feedback, and asked board members to reach out to department directors as needed. He reiterated the difficulty of the compressed schedule and the commitment to align public input with the board's strategic goals.

A. Departmental Budget Requests

- i. Information Technology

Tonya Easterwood, Zebulon's IT Director, presented the proposed FY26 technology budget, emphasizing strategic priorities aimed at securing and supporting the town's growing technological needs. With just two staff members in the IT department, including herself and a newly approved IT specialist, Ms. Easterwood outlined how the team handles everything from strategic planning and project management to daily tech support across all departments.

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The presentation focused on three core pillars: user support, data governance, and infrastructure. She explained efforts to equip staff with standardized, efficient devices, like tablets and laptops, especially for fieldwork, ensuring seamless operations regardless of location. The department was also developing an accurate inventory of technology assets and improving data-driven decision-making, while addressing connectivity gaps such as previously unreliable internet at the community center.

Ms. Easterwood highlighted the importance of involving IT in the early stages of software procurement to minimize redundancy and ensure better integration across departments. She noted improvements in infrastructure, including upgrades to servers, switches, and firewalls, and stressed the critical, though often invisible, role these elements play in security and daily operations. Examples included Office 365 licensing and cybersecurity tools to reduce phishing threats—staff, including board members, are occasionally tested as part of ongoing training.

On the budget side, she noted a modest increase, partly due to the new IT position. Tonya mentioned key expense areas including professional and contracted services, hardware upgrades, and network needs. She concluded by explaining that while the IT budget was previously folded into Administration, it was now presented as a standalone department for greater transparency as the town continues to grow.

ii. Economic Development

Shannon Johnson, Community and Economic Development Director, presented a draft budget focused on maintaining and expanding support for downtown revitalization, small business growth, and infrastructure planning. She began by discussing the Zebulon Downtown Development Association (ZDDA), highlighting the continued \$15,000 allocation for facade improvement grants, with five grants already issued and one pending. She noted the reintroduction of the Downtown Improvement Grant for building upfits, proposing \$15,000 contingent on ZDDA's implementation by mid-year.

She outlined a new \$19,000 capital improvement project to fund the Main Street Tourism Plan, developed with guidance from the NC Main Street Program and a consultant group, Uplift. This initiative, which began with a kickoff meeting and itinerary themes, was featured on regional tourism platforms. She highlighted that insurance coverage for ZDDA was necessary now that it operates as a nonprofit.

New funding for small business programming was introduced, including a business launch course at East Wake Tech beginning in September, and Zebulon's first comprehensive business retention and expansion program, aimed at surveying and supporting local businesses over the next 9–12 months.

For infrastructure, she requested \$30,000, which was reduced from \$50,000, for assessments at the historic 200 E. Horton Street property and to evaluate downtown water and sewer infrastructure. Additional budget items included \$10,000 for increased marketing, the completion of a new promotional video and website, and modest office furniture upgrades to make the department's current space more professional and public-friendly.

She closed the presentation noting that the overall request was less than the FY24–25 budget and welcomed follow-up questions from the board.

iii. Public Works

Tim Owens, Interim Public Works Director, began his remarks by providing a high-level overview of the department's budget and projects, noting that detailed backup information has been submitted to the Interim Town Manager. He introduced key staff members present, Mary Duffy-Administrative and Contracts Manager, Joel Collins-Capital Projects Manager, and Kevin Watson-Stormwater Manager, who were there mainly for support and to answer questions. Mr. Owens acknowledged current vacancies in the operations team and emphasized ongoing efforts to fill these positions.

He explained that the budget was divided among four divisions: property and project management, operations, Powell Bill, and stormwater, with most employees in property/project management and operations. He highlighted that much of the budget increase from the previous year reflected capital expenditure, including \$1.45 million in property/project management and \$5.5 million in operations projects. He detailed staffing changes, such as upgrading a part-time receptionist to full-time and promoting an administrative assistant.

He touched on capital project ordinances that span multiple budget years, noting that some projects were underway or nearly completed. He summarized key upcoming capital needs for FY 25–26, including replacing aging equipment like the town hall mower and bucket truck, expanding and upgrading the public works office, and adding paving funds. He stressed the importance of finding smarter ways to maintain service delivery without significantly increasing staffing.

He concluded by expressing appreciation for his team's expertise and dedication, emphasizing the need to fill vacancies to move forward effectively.

Interim Town Manager Jaiyeoba emphasized that the upcoming fiscal year will be a lean budget cycle, focused on maintaining essential operations rather than pursuing major new initiatives. He mentioned department directors have been instructed to keep requests minimal unless they were critical. He mentioned that most budget pressures were expected in Public Works, Parks & Recreation, and Police, with likely requests involving only filling vacancies or minor staffing adjustments, such as converting part-time roles to full-time.

Tai proposed moving the next work session from May 8th to May 7th due to scheduling conflicts and suggested holding a budget retreat on Saturday, June 7 to allow more in-depth review, given the compressed timeline. He confirmed the May 7 session would include presentations from the Fire, Police, Planning, and Parks & Recreation departments, and that the time for the June retreat was tentatively planned for the morning.

B. Compensation Study: David Hill Consultant

Finally, Tai introduced consultant David Hill, who would present the findings from the Town's compensation study. Mr. Hill, an expert in municipal compensation, was engaged after last year's budget adoption and would share comparative data and recommendations to support future staffing and salary planning.

David Hill from the Piedmont Triad Regional Council presented the results of a six-month compensation market study for the Town of Zebulon. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the competitiveness of the town's pay structure compared to similar municipalities and to recommend adjustments to support recruitment and retention. He noted that since the last comprehensive study in 2021, the town's average employee tenure has declined from 8.9 years to 6.28 years, indicating a younger workforce and higher turnover.

Mr. Hill commented that the study found that while the distribution of employee salaries across pay grades was generally healthy, the town appears to be hiring new employees at higher levels within the pay range, likely due to uncompetitive entry-level salaries. Hill mentioned the salary compression has improved since 2021, dropping from 40% to 27% of employees earning within 10% above the minimum for their range.

To assess competitiveness, Zebulon's positions were compared with similar roles in various North Carolina municipalities.

David Hill recommended adopting a "smoothed" pay plan with a standardized 50% range and consistent 5% steps between grades, which would also simplify the grade numbering system. He presented three options for implementing the new pay structure. The first option would affect 95% of the employees and cost \$1.1 million including payroll and benefits. The second option adjusted salaries based on years of service, placing employees at the midpoint by year eight, costing about \$312,000. The third option built on option two by also applying a 3% cost-of-living (COLA) with an estimated cost of about \$495,000.

Mr. Hill highlighted the importance of keeping salaries aligned with the market to maintain a competitive edge in hiring and retaining qualified staff.

During the discussion following the presentation, board members expressed interest in being able to follow up with David Hill if they had questions in the future.

Interim Town Manager Jaiyeoba mentioned that Mr. Hill's contact information would be shared, but that any communications should be coordinated through Finance Director Bobby Fitts to ensure efficiency and organization. He emphasized the importance of using one of the presented compensation scenarios as part of the upcoming budget plan. He noted that a similar study had been conducted in 2020 but had not been implemented, which contributed to the Town's ongoing challenges in retaining staff. He stressed that maintaining the status quo would not support the goal

of making Zebulon an employer of choice. Instead, the Town needed to adopt a strategy that attracted and retained employees long-term.

Tai explained that each scenario outlined in the study would have a positive impact, but some would affect more employees than others. He mentioned the inclusion of a 3% COLA adjustment in the third scenario was based on that analysis. He concluded that ultimately the goal was to determine which scenario was both beneficial and financially feasible within the constraints of the upcoming fiscal year's budget.

OLD BUSINESS

A. Planning

- i. Ordinance 2027-27 – Zebulon Mixed Use Development for 0, 1928, and 1938 Zebulon Rd

Chris Medina, Planner I, presented the rezoning request PD2025-02 for the Zebulon Mixed-Use Planned Development, which had been previously introduced at the April 14th joint public hearing. The 14.5-acre site, located at 01, 1928, and 1938 Zebulon Road, was proposed for rezoning from Heavy Commercial and Suburban Residential to a Planned Development district. He noted that the plan, submitted by Beth Bailey of McKim & Creed on behalf of property owners Martha and Lonnie Stancil, included three commercial outparcels, two mixed-use buildings with retail and apartments, and four standalone apartment buildings.

He highlighted pedestrian connectivity to the Beaver Creek Dam Trail, resident amenities, and compliance with perimeter, streetscape, and utility allocation requirements. He mentioned the developer also committed to road improvements along Zebulon Road. He confirmed that the proposal met or exceeded Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) standards and that the Planning Board had voted unanimously, with one recusal due to conflict of interest, to recommend approval. Mr. Medina highlighted staff also recommended approval, contingent on meeting Sections 2.2.25.J and 3.5.5 of the UDO.

The developer briefly recapped the Zebulon Mixed-Use project, highlighting two new commitments: incorporating pollinator plants and reserving 5% or 13 units for workforce housing. The plan proposed rezoning 14.5 acres to Planned Development, with commercial uses at the front, mixed-use buildings in the center, and residential units at the rear. It included 250 units, 25,000 sq. ft. of commercial space, various amenities, and greenway connectivity. The Developer highlighted that road improvements would be handled directly or through a fee-in-lieu. The developer emphasized the project's uniqueness for Zebulon and readiness to address any board questions.

Mayor Pro Tem Harrison made a motion, second by Commissioner Miles to approve Ordinance 2025-27 for the rezoning of the Zebulon Mixed-Use project, finding it consistent with the Grow Zebulon Comprehensive Land Use Plan and confirming that the standards of Section 2.2.25.J had been met as outlined in the prepared statement per UDO Section 2.2.15.8.

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Commissioner Miles expressed enthusiasm about the project, noting it offered a product not currently available in the community and looked forward to seeing its impact.

There was no further discussion and by roll vote the motion passed unanimously.

MANAGER'S REPORT

A. Financial Statement Update – Addendum

Interim Town Manager Jaiyeoba reported that the financial statement showed a summary of revenues and expenditures, noting there was nothing significant at this point in the year with two months remaining in the fiscal year. He stated that the Town was in a very good financial position. He mentioned a few minor budget transfers for the month, including reallocating funds within the governing board, police, and parks and recreation departments.

Bobby Fitts reported the following budget transfers.

Governing Board:

Moved \$5,000 from Retirement to Travel & Training;

Police:

Moved \$5,000 from Recruitment to Salaries (Overtime);

Parks & Recreation:

Moved \$5,000 from Team Uniforms to Grounds Maintenance;

B. Budget and Staffing Updates

Interim Town Manager Jaiyeoba updated that the Town faced some vacancies due to retirements and resignations, but progress was being made with interviews for Public Works Director and Human Resources Director positions underway. He mentioned he appointed Chris Perry and Teresa Piner to co-chair an interview panel, aiming to make job offers by mid-May. He noted that over 200 applicants had applied for director level roles, and he expected to provide more updates at the May 14th Work Session.

Additionally, he noted that Lisa Markland had agreed to join as Interim Town Clerk, with hopes of finalizing that by the end of June.

BOARD COMMENTS

Commissioner Clark shared that she had attended the North Carolina League of Municipalities conference the previous week, which she found very informative. She noted that Commissioner Baxter was appointed President of the Women in Municipal Government. Commissioner Clark expressed appreciation for the learning opportunities from various towns.

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Commissioner Harris thanked the staff for their hard work organizing and safely dismantling Spring Fest, expressing excitement for upcoming events. She also highlighted that it was Teacher Appreciation Week and encouraged everyone to recognize the efforts of teachers and school staff, noting that her own children were taught by some of them.

CLOSED SESSION

As allowed Per N.C. General Statute § 143-318.11:

- ii. Litigation Deacon Development, LLC v. The Town of Zebulon / Case #24-CVS-020692-910
- iii. Personnel Discussions

Commissioner Miles made a motion, second by Commissioner Baxter to go into the closed session. There was no discussion, and the motion passed unanimously.

NOTE: In the closed session, Commissioner Miles made a motion, second by Commissioner Davis to come out of closed session. There was no discussion, and the motion passed unanimously

There was no discussion, and the motion passed unanimously.


ADJOURN

Commissioner Baxter made a motion, second by Commissioner Harrison to adjourn. There was no discussion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Adopted this the 7th day of July 2025

SEAL




Glenn L. York – Mayor


Ana Gomez Rindahl – Town Clerk