

MINUTES OF THE WHITSETT TOWN COUNCIL
September 8, 2009
Whitsett Town Hall Building

PUBLIC HEARING

A public hearing was held at 7:00 p.m., Tuesday, September 8, 2009 at the Whitsett Town Hall. The following members of the Town Council were present: Mayor Richard Fennell, Mayor Pro Tem Andy Brown, Council members Jerry Rice, Ken Jacobs, and Cindy Wheeler. Also present were Town Administrator Gary Deal, Planning Board Chairman Bob Maccia, Randy McNeill and Mauricio Pacini representing the engineering firm of Davis-Martin-Powell & Associates, Inc., Rock Creek reporter Jamie Kennedy, and 25 members of the public.

Mayor Fennell called the public hearing to order at 7:00 p.m., and noted that a quorum was present. Council member Rice offered the invocation.

Mayor Fennell explained that this public hearing was the second of two required hearings to invite citizen input and discussion on the Town's proposal to apply for a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) with the NC Division of Community Assistance (DCA) for infrastructure to provide a public water supply to households with contaminated wells.

Mayor Fennell offered a brief explanation of the need and scope of the project for which the Town is requesting funding assistance, stating that almost 30 years ago, the Town became aware of probable petroleum contamination from two leaking underground storage tanks at service stations near the intersection of highways 70 and 61. More than 2 years ago, the suspect wells of households in this area were tested by the County; and a state toxicology lab confirmed contamination for some 23 households—17 severely and 6 tainted with traces.

The Town, at this point, considered three options: (1) leave the situation as is, (2) drill more wells, and (3) plan for a public water system. Option 1 had been dismissed since contaminants presented a public health risk. Two had also not been an option since the plume continued to spread and had reached the deep bedrock. Option 3 would be the only reasonable choice.

Further, Mayor Fennell stated that the Town already having a contract with the City of Burlington to buy water, had turned its efforts to seeking funding assistance for running water mains to the homes with contaminated wells. With the Town unsuccessful in its plight to secure CDBG funding last year, reapplying this year was encouraged.

Following submission of a preliminary package to DCA, Town officials were invited to meet with the administrator of the CDBG assistance program which is a favorable indicator that the Town would be eligible to proceed with its grant application.

Those who accompanied Town officials to the meeting with the state were Randy McNeill of the engineering firm of Davis-Martin-Powell, who in 1999 had developed a water and sewer feasibility study for the Town, and Gary Wilson of Benchmark CMR, Inc., whose expertise lies in project and grant development and who had formulated the documentation over the last 2 years for submittal to DCA.

Subsequent to the meeting with DCA, the Town received official notification to pursue its application for CDBG assistance which then required a second public hearing; hence, tonight's hearing. Mayor Fennell introduced Randy McNeill, who following preliminary remarks, would field the concerns and questions from the audience.

Randy McNeill explained in a snapshot that Davis-Martin-Powell started with Whitsett laying out what it would take to build a water and sewer system to service the entire town. The outcome amounts were astronomical, which launched the pursuit of grant opportunities; and the CDBG program is the first one that has come to fruition. This progress to date Mr. McNeill attributed primarily to the workings of Benchmark planning consultant Gary Wilson, stating that Benchmark sets the boundaries and parameters of a project and is keen in establishing an attractive project deserving of serious consideration for funding assistance. For instance, a public utilities project on a larger scale, i.e., town wide, may receive review and consideration; yet, a realistic, foreseeable smaller-scale project may receive a higher priority—thus, funding. Benchmark sharpens the pencil well in this arena. [As an aside, Mr. McNeill explained that Gary Wilson was out of the country and, therefore, could not be present at tonight's public hearing.]

Randy McNeill then explained that the Town would be applying for the maximum allowed of \$750,000 in grant funds. In addition, Mr. McNeill mentioned that to the Town's benefit, the local commitment for 5% matching funds had been waived for this year due to economic constraints on municipalities. He continued to explain that, if awarded, the grant would be used to install 5,500 feet of water lines in and around the intersection of highways 70 and 61, and including the Coleman Road loop. Currently, a 24" Burlington water main runs through the highway 70 corridor; and the 5,500 feet of lines would connect to this main and supply Burlington water to the 23 affected dwellings.

To further demonstrate the proposed water system, Mr. McNeill turned to an enlarged mounted display of two exhibits from the Davis-Martin-Powell preliminary engineering report that mapped out the water line layout, the location of the master meter, and the 23 parcels involved.

Following his remarks and references, Randy McNeill opened the floor for questions and concerns which focused mainly on costs to the homeowner. At this juncture, however, he asked for a show of hands from the residents with contaminated wells who would be in favor of connecting to a safe public water supply; and about 15 hands went up.

Moving on to the issues raised by residents including costs, the concerns were tap fees, household hook-up responsibility and costs, estimates of monthly bills for water usage, imposing mandatory connection, system operational costs, etc.

Randy McNeill explained that with regard to tap fees, low to moderate income households would receive free taps and free connection to the dwelling. For those who do not qualify for low to moderate income in accordance with Guilford County stipulation, the homeowner would be responsible for acquiring a plumber to connect the household plumbing to the right-of-way meter at the homeowner's expense; and, at this time, pay the tap fee as set by the Whitsett Town Council, which generally range from \$1,000 to \$2,000. Relative to monthly water bills and rates, Town Administrator Gary Deal reported that Stokesdale about 5 years ago went through a similar process; and the average four-member family unit used about 4,000 gallons per month equating to about \$38.00 per month.

Finally, Randy McNeill stated that he was confident in this endeavor; usually a municipality does not get this far in the process without the formality of acceptance which lead to the inquiry of a timeline. Town Administrator Deal responded that the Town would hope to hear from DCA in November. Randy McNeill added then there is the state processing and paperwork that would follow. Followed by a Town procuring process for bids and interviews for infrastructure construction and installation.

Ultimately, the public water system is expected to be complete with a clean water supply to the 23 households in the year 2011. Following this completion, the Town may choose to apply for additional grant monies to expand the system to service more households; and may actually become more eligible for those funds since the Town would have had an existing system, making it more attractive for upgrades or add-ons. The Town, however, could not go after additional grants until this initial CDBG grant has been exhausted.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further discussion on the one item scheduled for public comment, Mayor Fennell made a motion to adjourn the public hearing. Council member Ken Jacobs seconded the motion; and the public hearing was adjourned at 7:40 p.m. to proceed with the regular monthly meeting where the Town Council would vote on action for submittal of a full application for an infrastructure grant.

/s/

/s/

Jo Hesson, Town Clerk

Richard Fennell, Mayor

APPROVED: October 13, 2009