



**TOWN OF AYDEN  
GOVERNING BOARD  
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING  
MINUTES**

September 30, 2019 – 7pm  
Ayden Town Hall – Second Floor Boardroom

I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Call to Order

Mayor Tripp called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

B. Roll Call

Present:

Mayor Tripp

Mayor Pro-tem Mewborn

Commissioner Ross, Commissioner Goff, Commissioner Langley, Commissioner Davis

Absent:

None

Also Present:

Steven L Harrell – Town Manager

Sarah Radcliff – Town Clerk

Scott Dixon – Town Attorney

C. Welcome Visitors

Mayor Tripp welcomed everyone to the meeting.

D. Invocation

Mayor Tripp gave the invocation.

E. Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Tripp led the Pledge of Allegiance.

F. Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda as presented.

Motion: Mayor Pro-tem Mewborn

Second: Commissioner Davis

Discussion: None

Approved: 5-0

The motion passed unanimously.

## II. DISCUSSION OF VACANT COMMERCIAL BUILDING CODE

Mayor Tripp stated he did not want to hear any finger-pointing. He stated we value the citizens' opinions and our goal is to get the buildings filled and operating. Manager Harrell stated we would like to hear public comments with suggestions and ideas on how to fill the vacant buildings, including things in the ordinance they would like to see changed. He stated we would not take any action tonight.

1. Kathy Robinson stated there was a new business owner in town that did not get notice of the meeting or a copy of the ordinance. She said if parking is an issue, we shouldn't allow businesses to post "no parking" signs in public spaces. She stated the 2-hour parking is not enforced. She suggested the town get her name and contact number and share it with anyone who comes to Ayden looking for something. She stated she had a tenant that went to get their utilities turned on and didn't receive any information about when their garbage would be picked up. She stated the fee being charged for registration was a penalty, not a fee. She stated the curb and gutter was a problem that needed to be addressed. She suggested getting rid of the ordinance and collecting names and numbers and handing them out when they sign up for utilities.
2. Rudy Robinson, Jr. asked if we were still maintaining that the property owners owe the citations they have been given. Commissioner Langley stated when the vacant property ordinance went into effect, there were timelines set for registration and if they didn't comply they were fined. Mayor Tripp stated there was some talk at the last meeting from Commissioner Goff about forgiving those fines. Commissioner Langley said they did vote to waive the fees, but they still need to comply with the ordinance. Mayor Tripp said tonight was about finding opportunities to not make it punitive. He said the intent is to occupy the buildings. He stated what he recalled is the penalties will be dropped until we get the ordinance in place through a partnership with the owners. He stated the buildings have been vacant for many years and we need them occupied to get foot traffic in our downtown area to get commerce. He said we do not want to be punitive, but to be a partner to get where we need to go.
3. Tony Dail asked if there was a list of available properties somewhere. He said that would be helpful. He said Ayden looks "nappy". He said people judge downtown by what they see in town. He said it's not being kept up. He said the town has to lead in the right direction. He said concrete is torn up, grass is high, the roads are terrible and trash is not being picked up beside the road. He stated he sees employees on cell phones all the time and he doesn't think it should be allowed. Commissioner Langley agreed that we did need a list of buildings available and that was the first step in the property registration process. Mr. Dail said if you walk the town you know what's vacant.
4. Leonard Gibson said we've been talking about improving downtown for 20 years. He stated this ordinance has hurt, not helped, the downtown. He stated he contacted the School of Government and asked them about the ordinance. He said they told him it's only good until it's tried. They said the \$1,000 fee is excessive. He stated we need some incentive to do things. He

said all the owners would like to have the deal Quilt Lizzy got. He suggested taking out the part about having a realtor and make it simple.

5. Jerry Bowling stated he would like to see Ayden thrive again. He said he had been in business in Ayden for over 30 years. He felt the bypass would take the business even further away from the downtown area. He said the way people do business has changed. He said this seems very punitive to him as well. He said someone had mentioned parking. He said he was told we had plenty of parking, but if you're not from the area, there are no signs to show where the available parking is. He said he was told we needed the ordinance to tell the town what buildings were vacant and who owned them. He said you can walk down the street and tell an empty building without having to have an ordinance, and you can go online and put the address in to see who owns it. He stated he didn't trust the Board and he didn't understand where all this comes from and how we continue to vote for it.
6. Judy Pechtel said we need to focus on the positives, like the good schools, and try to attract more than retail, like doctor's offices. She said if we penalize the owners now, new businesses aren't going to come in. She said there are a lot of unanswered questions, concern, hurt and anger. She said before any major decisions are made, they need to consider removing the penalties and set guidelines that are feasible for everybody.
7. Shirley Dennis stated she has a building that is rented and she tries to keep it up but it is expensive. She said she cleans up trash around her properties but the town doesn't keep the grass cut and the trees aren't taken care of. She said the telephone poles are growing up with Virginia Creeper and no one is taking care of it. She said she doesn't feel like the town is helping the businesses. She asked if they register a vacant property if there is a charge.
8. Alice Cannon Parker said the town needs to partner with the businesses and the owners and put us all under the same umbrella. She said you can't just spotlight certain businesses and we all need to be treated the same. She said she is struggling to get her business back after a fire and no one has checked on her to see how they're doing. She said once we all come together, we will grow.
9. Gwendolyn Yznitsky stated she had been in business at Gwendy's Goodies for 4 ½ years and she loves Ayden. She said she was very encouraged with the suggestions that were being given. She said when she announced she was moving to Greenville, it was because she was able to find business owners who would partner with her to help her, and she struggled to find that in Ayden. Since then, she has had response from the town, Sam Jones, and Todd Dail, and was planning to stay in Ayden. She said it will take all of us working together instead of pointing at each other. She said it is a challenge, and a tough economy, so we have to offer something special to attract businesses. She said she has had people come into her business looking for a vacant building but can't get what they need. She said there are several vacant buildings that are not being rented and we need to figure out why.
10. Sam Jones stated we need to focus on the positive. He said he believed that the town staff and board was trying to address an issue by this ordinance. He said what has been done in the past wasn't working. He said it took the ordinance to get the input necessary to get the right ordinance, because nobody cares until it affects them directly. He said the town is being held accountable for things that aren't their job. He said the town has had to hire a third party to maintain property that the town does not own to cut grass. Wayne Hardee stated there were 41 yards. Mr. Jones said if the people won't keep their properties up, we need to take it from them. He said its an expense to the town that is unnecessary. He said it's not the town's job to market the entire community, it's the business or property owner's job to market their own business. He said people want the government out of their business, but want their help, and you can't have it both ways. He said we will all be better off being part of the solution instead of poking

holes in the current plan. He said you don't criticize a current plan if you don't have an alternative. He said the code of ordinances need to be enforced. He asked the manager to clarify about the grant that Quilt Lizzy got. Manager Harrell stated it was a \$500,000 CDBG. He said if she closes before the four years are up, she has to pay back the difference. Additionally, she had to prove that she had the same credit worthiness and be able to borrow the \$500,000 and she had to put up \$125,000 of her own money. Mr. Jones said he thought the ordinance was directed at problem properties. He said there were some properties that had been vacant for at least a decade, and those needed to be dealt with. He said the town cannot accomplish everything that has been demanded and keep dipping in the general fund to balance the budget. He said it was time for the board to "Flex their muscle".

Mayor Tripp said the board would get the notes and review them and see how they can move forward in partnership with the property owners. He said the board tries to do what is best, but sometimes we miss it. He said tonight was the first step in the direction to correct it. Mayor Tripp apologized for the aesthetics of the town and said it would be addressed. He recommended to the manager pull a list of opportunities identified here and have them given to the board members at the next meeting. They would then set it as an agenda item to come back and discuss how they want to proceed.

Mayor Pro-tem Mewborn thanked everyone for coming and participating. He said we are going to take heed and all rise together. He said we will get it right, we're human and we all make mistakes.

Commissioner Ross thanked everyone for sharing and said all of their concerns were important. She agreed with Mr. Jones that we need to hold people accountable. She said we are all for doing what is best for the business owners and the town.

Commissioner Goff said we have been given good insight, ideas and challenges and we need to work together to solve these issues.

Commissioner Langley agreed with the others. He challenged the citizens if they see something not being done, to call him and report it, and he will call the manager and get it resolved.

Commissioner Davis said they were all intelligent and they can get together and make a sound decision. He said it won't happen overnight, but it will be done.

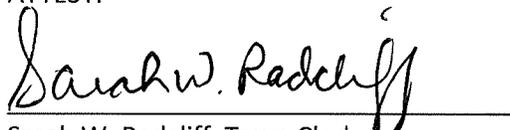
### III. ADJOURNMENT

Having completed the business before them, Mayor Tripp announced that without objection the Governing Board would stand adjourned at 8:48pm.

AYDEN, NORTH CAROLINA

  
Stephen W. Tripp, Mayor

ATTEST:

  
Sarah W. Radcliff, Town Clerk

