March 30, 2026 Budget Retreat
Meeting minutes

Call Meeting to Order

Mayor Eddie Marlowe called the March 30, 2026 Budget Retreat to order at 9:01 a.m.

Roll Call: Mayor Marlowe conducted roll call. All board members were present- Alderman Genita Hill, Mayor Pro Tempore/Alderman Gary Lingerfelt, Alderman Allen Bumgarner, Alderman Tim Hertzel, Alderman Phyllis Pennington, and Mayor Eddie Marlowe.

Invocation

Town Manager James Cozart led the invocation.

Budget Presentation Schedule

McGill & Associates: Water & Sewer System Asset Inventory and Assessment

Representatives from McGill & Associates delivered a comprehensive presentation on the Asset Inventory and Assessment (AIA) project for the Town of Long View's water and sewer utility systems. The presentation was led by Senior Project Manager Mr. RJ Mozeley, Financial Services Analyst Dale Schepers, and Project Consultant Greg Padgett.

Aging Infrastructure Overview

Mr. Mozeley opened by contextualizing Long View's infrastructure challenges within the broader national landscape. He referenced the American Society of Civil Engineers' 2025 infrastructure report, which gave the United States an overall infrastructure grade of "C," with wastewater infrastructure specifically receiving a "D+" rating. He also cited a recent Associated Press article from approximately March 10th describing a massive raw sewage spill into the Potomac River near Baltimore, caused by aging and failing infrastructure, that released hundreds of millions of gallons over several days. Mr. Mozeley emphasized that while Long View's system could not produce a spill of that magnitude, the underlying issue of aging infrastructure was not unique to Long View — it was a nationwide crisis.

AIA Program Background

Mr. Mozeley explained that the Division of Water Infrastructure (DWI), a state agency within the Division of Environmental Quality (DEQ), had funded the AIA project. The town received two separate awards — one for the water system and one for the sewer system — both of which are part of the overall enterprise fund. He noted that DWI and DEQ had developed the Asset Inventory and Assessment program approximately 10 to 15 years ago to help utilities move beyond simply reacting to repair problems and instead make more strategic, proactive decisions about infrastructure investment.

Scope of the Water System AIA

Mr. Mozeley outlined the scope of work for the water system AIA, which included:

- **GIS and Field Mapping Updates:** The town had previously done considerable mapping work in partnership with a COG. McGill updated those maps to correct line sizes, remove abandoned lines from the records, and otherwise clean up the mapping data.
- **Asset Condition Assessment:** Using the updated maps as a foundation, McGill assessed the condition of all assets by factoring in installation dates, pipe material types, known break history, and staff knowledge of recurring problem areas.
- **Priority Ranking:** Using an objective scoring system, assessments were used to prioritize needs within Long View's specific utility system, recognizing that "great condition" or "poor condition" are relative terms that must be defined within the context of each individual utility.
- **Opinions of Probable Cost:** Generic cost estimates were developed based on McGill's familiarity with the construction industry and Long View's specific system.
- **Capital Improvements Plan (CIP):** An updated 10-year CIP was developed based on the prioritized needs.
- **Utility Enterprise Fund Revenue Modeling:** A financial model specific to Long View was developed to ensure the CIP was backed by a sustainable revenue strategy — not just a wish list.
- **Asset Management Plan and Final Report:** A comprehensive document summarizing all findings was prepared for the state as the required deliverable.

Consequence and Likelihood of Failure Matrix

Mr. Mozeley introduced the risk-scoring matrix used to evaluate and prioritize infrastructure needs. He explained that each asset is scored based on two key metrics: the **likelihood of failure** and the **consequence of failure**. He provided an example to illustrate the concept: a 1-inch galvanized waterline from 1967 serving two homes at the end of a cul-de-sac has a high likelihood of failure but a low consequence of failure, whereas a major transmission line serving a large commercial customer such as Maple Springs Laundry carries a much higher consequence of failure if it were to go down. Assets scoring in the higher-risk "tan" or "red" zones on the matrix receive the highest priority for replacement.

Water System Assessment Findings — Mr. Greg Padgett

Mr. Padgett presented detailed findings from the water system assessment:

- **Pipe Materials:** The majority of Long View's water system is constructed of PVC and ductile iron (DIP). Cast iron (CIP), asbestos cement (AC), copper, and galvanized pipe are also present in smaller quantities.
- **System Age:** Mr. Padgett highlighted that 44 percent of the water system is over 50 years old. He noted that the industry standard life expectancy for water pipe is approximately 40 to 60 years, with some pipes lasting 100 years. However, he cautioned that the town's system is heavily weighted toward older infrastructure, which creates elevated risk. When combining the "over 50" and "41 to 50" categories, approximately 60 percent of the system is considered old.
- **Pipe Sizes:** A range of pipe sizes was identified, with 12-inch lines representing the primary transmission infrastructure. Mr. Padgett noted that a failure of the 12-inch main — such as the trunk line serving Maple Springs — would be far more consequential than a failure of a smaller distribution line.
- **Water Tank:** Mr. Padgett noted that the town's one remaining water tank was reviewed and found to be in great condition.
- **Priority Water Projects:** Based on scoring and input from Public Utilities Director Chris Eckert, five priority water projects were identified. Mr. Padgett noted that several of these projects were clustered in what staff referred to as the "problem area" — a location that Chris Eckert had flagged due to recurring issues.

Sewer System Assessment Findings — Mr. Padgett

Mr. Padgett transitioned to the sewer system assessment findings:

- **Pipe Materials:** Mr. Padgett stated plainly that a large portion of Long View's sewer system is clay pipe. He explained that clay pipe has not been manufactured or installed for many years. While it was once a good product, every section has a joint approximately every three feet, and those joints are susceptible to root intrusion. Root intrusion and cracked joints allow groundwater infiltration and inflow (I&I) into the system, which increases the volume of flow that must be managed and paid for — even though the town no longer operates its own wastewater treatment plant.
- **System Age:** Mr. Padgett reported that 54 percent of the sewer system is over 50 years old, and when including pipe 40 years and older, approximately 80 percent of the sewer system is aging or old — making it even older on average than the water system.

- **Pipe Sizes:** Most of the sewer system consists of 8-inch pipe, which is a common size. The 15-inch and 24-inch lines are the primary trunk lines. Mr. Padgett noted that the 24-inch line runs along Route 40 toward the Henry Ford plant area.
- **Priority Sewer Projects:** Several priority projects were identified, including aging lines near Fry Creek and the 24-inch trunk line corridor. Mr. Padgett noted that the proximity of the sewer line to the water line in certain areas elevated the priority, because a sewer line failure in those locations could compromise the water supply and potentially trigger a boiling water advisory.

Pump Station Assessment

Mr. Padgett presented findings on the town's three pump stations:

- **General Condition:** Overall, the pump stations were found to be well-maintained with no significant extraordinary findings.
- **Grease:** Mr. Padgett specifically noted the absence of grease buildup in the pump stations, crediting effective grease trap enforcement or public behavior, and calling it "remarkable" compared to most municipalities.
- **Fry Creek Pump Station (Fry 3):** Mr. Padgett described this as the town's large pump station, which is equipped with a bar screen. He observed that the bar screen's grates were too wide, allowing rags and debris to pass through to the pumps — causing wear and tear. He noted there was also some corrosion at the bottom of the bar screen. He recommended replacing the bar screen with one featuring smaller openings to better capture debris before it reaches the pumps.
- **Cape Hickory Pump Station:** This submersible pump station was reviewed and found to be in acceptable condition. Minor evidence of grease was noted but was not considered a significant concern.
- **Telemetry:** Mr. Padgett noted that only one of the three pump stations — Fry Creek — currently has telemetry. He recommended adding telemetry to the other two stations. Without telemetry, state rules require a physical visit every day. With telemetry, staff can monitor pump station status remotely via phone or laptop and receive automated alerts, eliminating the need for daily on-site visits.

Alderman Hill asked whether homeowners in a sloped neighborhood who experience sewer backups in their basements might see similar problems if only a portion of the line is replaced. Mr. Padgett explained that a failure upstream would eventually cause backups working their way toward the lower homes, with the lowest-elevation homes being affected first. He acknowledged it was a difficult question to answer definitively without knowing the specific pipe age and elevations.

Enterprise Fund Explanation — Mr. Mozeley

Mr. Mozeley took time to clarify an important conceptual distinction for the council: the water and sewer enterprise fund is entirely separate from the general fund. Tax dollars are not supposed to flow into the enterprise fund, and the enterprise fund may only reimburse the general fund for costs that the state deems reasonable — such as proportional contributions from staff like the town manager, finance director, and town clerk. Mr. Mozeley emphasized that the enterprise fund is essentially a business, and it must be operated in a way that generates enough revenue to stay financially sustainable over time. He noted that the goal is not to generate profit for shareholders but to maintain adequate fund balance so that the utility system can serve both current and future Long View citizens responsibly. He also noted that the Local Government Commission (LGC) audits the fund just as it audits the general fund.

Mr. Mozeley noted that the entire enterprise fund represents approximately $2.8 million for the Town of Long View, and underscored that all discussion pertained specifically to user fees — not tax dollars.

Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) Overview — Dale Schepers

Dale Schepers introduced himself, noting approximately 10 years with McGill & Associates and 30 years prior in local government, including service as a public works director, utility director, and certified operator for systems ranging from 1,000 to 30,000 connections. He summarized his core philosophy: "What gets measured gets managed," and stated that all recommendations are grounded in informed, data-driven decision-making.

Mr. Schepers described the CIP as a 10-year schedule of projects identified by the engineering assessment, with color coding to indicate the proposed funding mechanism. Blue-highlighted projects represent items proposed to be funded via a bank loan (debt issuance). He outlined the general approaches available to pay for infrastructure needs:

1. **Wait for grant funding** — Mr. Schepers cautioned that relying on free money would leave the majority of needed work unfunded.
2. **Deferral** — Mr. Schepers called this approach irresponsible, noting that continual deferral eventually results in infrastructure failure on someone else's watch.
3. **Planned debt issuance** — The model was built conservatively using a 15-year note at market interest rates. Mr. Schepers noted that the state revolving fund offers more favorable terms (20-year notes at half market rate), but the model uses the conservative assumption so that the plan remains viable even if preferred financing is unavailable.

Inflation and Cost Escalation

Mr. Schepers presented data on cost inflation specific to water and wastewater utilities. While the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for 2025 was approximately 2 percent following the COVID-era spike, the Bureau of Labor Statistics' inflation index specific to water and wastewater maintenance is approximately 4.7 percent annually — roughly double the general CPI. Mr. Schepers emphasized this distinction is critical for utility financial planning.

Financial Model Overview

Mr. Schepers described the revenue model as entirely customized for Long View — not a plug-and-play template. The model is designed to demonstrate full cost recovery and long-term sustainability. He walked through the key components:

- **Revenue Sources:** New customer growth (approximately 1 percent annually) and rate increases represent the two primary revenue streams. Rate increases represent the largest and most critical revenue driver.
- **Expense Categories:** Operating expenses (electricity, labor, etc.) represent approximately 80 percent of the cost structure and grow at approximately 4.5 percent annually. Capital outlay and debt service represent the remaining categories. Existing debt service was noted to be minimal but would grow as new projects are funded.
- **Proposed Debt Service:** Each blue-highlighted project in the CIP corresponds to a new debt issuance, with each subsequent issuance adding to the cumulative annual debt service obligation over the 10-year period.
- **Fund Balance:** The model tracks fund balance throughout the 10-year window. Currently at approximately 94 percent of annual operating expenses (roughly one year's worth of expenses in reserve), the model shows fund balance remaining relatively stable throughout the planning period, indicating a financially healthy utility.

Mr. Schepers presented a graphic showing the current rate trajectory (dashed line) versus the revenue-adjusted trajectory (black line) needed to cover all projected expenses. He explained that even without any capital projects, the current rate structure would result in a deficit by approximately 2029. With the full cost of ongoing expenses like Duke Energy power bills and City of Hickory water treatment fees increasing annually, rates must rise simply to maintain operations — before even addressing capital needs.

Impact on Customer Bills

Alderman Bumgarner noted the projected increase in the monthly 3,000-gallon bill from the current rate of $59.29 to approximately $161.32 over 10 years and asked where customers would find the money to pay those higher rates. Mr. Schepers acknowledged this was ultimately the council's decision to make, noting that the model presents the full picture — including which capital projects are planned and at what cost — and that the council has the ability to defer or modify the capital plan to reduce the rate impact. He noted, however, that deferral comes with its own risks as infrastructure continues to age. Alderman Bumgarner also observed that cost increases were hitting everyone across all categories — groceries, utilities, and everything else.

Grant Funding Availability

Mr. Mozeley shared data indicating that over the study period, approximately 92 to 93 percent of all water and sewer capital projects in North Carolina were funded through loans (local money, EPA assistance, or DWI loans) rather than outright grants. This means that if the town were to rely solely on grant funding, only approximately 7 to 8 percent of identified needs could be addressed.

Key Performance Indicators

Mr. Schepers presented several key performance indicators (KPIs) for the utility:

- **Cost Recovery Ratio:** Currently greater than 1.0, meaning the utility is generating more revenue than it is spending — a positive indicator.
- **Days Working Capital:** Currently approximately 365 days (roughly one year's worth of operating expenses in fund balance), tracking steady over the near term.
- **Debt Service as a Percentage of Revenue:** The literature suggests that a debt service ratio of 25 percent or less indicates a utility is not overburdened by debt. The current debt is minimal, with existing debt service going to zero in FY27 before new proposed debt begins to layer in.
- **Asset Condition Ratio:** The LGC monitors this metric and issues a letter of concern when a utility's assets are more than 50 percent consumed (i.e., less than 50 percent of useful life remaining). Long View is currently below the 50 percent threshold but trending downward without reinvestment. Dale noted that once capital reinvestment begins, the ratio will start trending upward. He also noted that having an active CIP and financial model in place is the appropriate response to any LGC inquiry — demonstrating that the town is actively working on a solution rather than ignoring the problem.

Rate Comparison

Mr. Schepers presented a comparison of Long View's current $59.29 bill for 3,000 gallons against the statewide median collected by the UNC School of Government rates dashboard —

which tracks approximately 740 North Carolina utilities. Long View's current rate is approximately at the statewide median, suggesting the utility is in a reasonably affordable position relative to peers. Mr. Schepers acknowledged that affordability is a complex topic with many competing academic methodologies, but noted that being near the middle of the statewide distribution is a reasonable starting benchmark. He also noted that the median rate across the state is itself expected to increase at approximately 4.7 percent annually, meaning that Long View's rates would need to increase slightly faster than inflation in order to also address capital investment needs.

At the conclusion of the McGill & Associates presentation, the Town Manager noted that Public Utilities Director Chris Eckert did not have the opportunity to present his portion, and that he would be rescheduled to present at approximately 1:30 PM following lunch.

Break

A recess 15 minute was taken.

Long View Police Department:

Chief Justin Reid Presenting, Accompanied by Major Dennis Hardin

Chief of Police Reid presented the Long View Police Department's budget request for the upcoming fiscal year. He opened by expressing gratitude to the council for the opportunity to present, and noted that while his position was relatively new to him, his law enforcement background spanned virtually all aspects of the field. He stated that his overarching goal upon becoming chief was the safety of the community, and that his vision was for Long View to be one of the safest communities in the nation. He acknowledged the department had made significant progress toward that goal and outlined how the budget request was designed to continue that trajectory through training, equipment, and operational needs.

Year-Over-Year Crime Statistics

Chief Reid presented comparative crime statistics to establish context for his budget requests:

- **Overall Call Volume:** Down 5 percent, attributed to increased proactive patrol services and property checks. He explained that when a department becomes proactive rather than reactive, it reduces both crime and call volume.
- **Self-Initiated Activity:** Significantly increased, reflecting officers voluntarily engaging with suspicious persons, conducting building checks, and making voluntary subject contacts — all without being dispatched.
- **Arson:** Down 48 percent.

- **Residential Breaking and Entering:** Down 36 percent.
- **Business Breaking and Entering:** Down 70 percent — Chief Reid noted the department was approaching zero business B&Es, which he described as "unheard of" for a community of any size.
- **Vehicle Breaking and Entering:** Decreased.
- **Motor Vehicle Thefts:** Decreased, though Chief Reid noted Long View had historically experienced an unusually high rate of vehicle thefts for its size, something he was still working to understand fully.
- **Drug Overdoses:** Decreased, attributed to the department's increased focus on drug enforcement.

Chief Reid emphasized that the primary driver of these improvements was increased manpower, and that continued investment in personnel, equipment, and training was necessary to sustain these outcomes.

Budget Request Summary

Chief Reid presented the following items as his budget requests for the upcoming fiscal year:

1. New Specialized Position — Dedicated Narcotics Investigator

Chief requested funding for a new dedicated narcotics investigator position. He explained that the current Criminal Investigation Division (CID) structure consists of a lieutenant and two investigators who must divide their time between narcotics investigations and all other serious crimes — including rapes, child assaults, sexual assaults, and violent crimes. This division of attention limits the department's ability to conduct thorough, sustained narcotics investigations.

Chief Reid described his vision for the position as one focused on Long View — not on supporting other agencies. The investigator would handle all drug crimes and, because drugs and street crime are closely linked, would also work on shootings and gang-related activity within town limits.

On the topic of gang activity, Chief Reid confirmed that Long View does have a gang presence, though he noted it operates primarily as an offshoot of gangs based in Hickory. The primary pattern he observed was Hickory-based gangs recruiting Long View juveniles and directing them to commit crimes in Long View to earn status within the gang. Chief Reid noted this activity is serious and works its way through the court system.

Chief Reid also noted that the timing aligned well with a county wide and newly formed Street Crime/Drug Task Force, which includes the multiple agencies.

Chief Reid stated he would like to place the new narcotics investigator on that task force, which would also generate financial benefit to the town through asset forfeiture — potentially 20 to 25 percent of any drugs or money seized in joint operations.

The cost of the position was based on investigator-level salary plus benefits and initial uniform and equipment costs.

Mayor Marlowe raised a concern about supervision and accountability for such a position, referencing past experience with narcotics assignments where the assigned officer was frequently pulled to other county priorities and rarely focused on Long View. Chief Reid acknowledged the validity of the concern directly and stated that the position would be supervised through the CID lieutenant and above, with clear accountability to ensure the investigator remained focused on Long View's problem houses and street crime rather than being absorbed into county-level operations. He noted that drug investigations are time-intensive — often taking three to four months from initial complaint to felony charges — and that the current CID staffing is stretched too thin to do that work effectively alongside other serious crimes.

2. Bulletproof Vest Replacement

Chief Reid requested funding to replace two bulletproof vests. He explained that vests are manufactured from Kevlar, which degrades over time due to movement and exposure to the elements. The manufacturer warranty expires after five years, and after that point, the vests must be replaced because if an officer is shot while wearing an expired vest, the town could face liability for any resulting injury. The cost for two vests and their carriers was $2,000.

3. Comp Time — Transition to Overtime Pay

Chief Reid provided an in-depth overview of the department's comp time situation and requested a budget adjustment to eliminate comp time in favor of a straight overtime pay model.

He acknowledged and expressed appreciation for the council's approval of an overtime budget in the prior year, stating it had greatly improved officer morale. He then explained several problems with the current comp time system:

- Officers accrue comp time that can build up to 100 hours. When officers resign or are terminated with comp time balances, the town is legally required to pay out those balances, creating unpredictable budget impacts.
- A policy ambiguity existed around whether officers earned comp time at straight time (hour-for-hour) or at time-and-a-half. This created disputes upon separation from employment.

- In Fiscal year 2024, 2,040 hours of comp time were used by officers.

Chief calculated that converting all comp time usage to time-and-a-half overtime pay would require an additional $75,000 in the overtime budget. He noted that by having a fixed overtime budget, the department would eliminate the risk of large unexpected payouts from accumulated comp time balances.

Alderman Hill asked how much was spent on comp time in Fiscal year2025 for comparison purposes, and Chief Reid provided the department's figures. The Town Manager confirmed the discussion pertained to fiscal year 2024 data.

Chief Reid noted that for now, the comp time request was placed toward the lower end of his priority list, as the department could continue operating with the current combination of overtime and comp time if the full conversion was not funded.

4. Training Budget Increase

Chief Reid requested a $3,000 increase to the training budget, citing several cost drivers:

- **Instructor Certifications:** The department had lost several certified instructors over time and Chief Reid wanted to rebuild that in-house training capacity. Recertification costs have increased significantly — for example, taser instructor certification that once cost $200 now costs approximately $900 and must be renewed every two years. Less-than-lethal instructor certification (covering pepper spray, gas, and impact munitions) costs $1,000.

- **Conferences and Seminars:** Officers are reaching a level of proficiency where they are ready to attend more specialized training, such as the School Resource Officer conference and narcotics officer conferences. These events involve travel, conference registration, and per diem costs.

- **Ammunition:** The cost of both duty and training ammunition has increased. Chief Reid noted that all duty and training ammunition comes out of the training budget and that maintaining an adequate supply is essential for officer preparedness and certification.

5. Axon Contract Renewal

Chief Reid identified the Axon contract renewal as one of the largest expenditures in his budget request. The previous five-year contract — which the prior board paid for upfront in full — expired in October. That contract included body cameras, tasers, and cloud-based storage.

Chief Reid described the proposed new five-year contract and the enhancements he was requesting:

- **Body Cameras (Updated to Model 3):** The new contract would include an upgrade from the current Model 2 body cameras to the improved Model 3 cameras. Chief Reid reaffirmed the critical value of body cameras in reducing liability, noting that he personally reviews camera footage nearly daily to address public complaints — many of which are resolved immediately when the footage is reviewed. In some cases, he shows the footage to the complainant directly.

- **In-Car Cameras:** Chief Reid requested that patrol car cameras be added to the new contract for the first time. Each patrol vehicle would receive a forward-facing camera and a rear-facing camera covering the prisoner transport area. He noted the rear camera would address situations where individuals in custody claim to have been harmed by officers when in fact, they injured themselves. He acknowledged the department's strict pursuit policy limits the frequency of high-speed situations but emphasized the overall liability protection value.

- **Taser Upgrade (Model 7 to Model 10):** Chief Reid requested an upgrade from the current TASER Model 7 to the TASER Model 10. Key differences include: the Model 7 carries two cartridges with two probes each; the Model 10 carries 10 probes total, allowing sequential deployment if initial probes fail to make contact. Additionally, the Model 10 has doubled the effective range to approximately 40 to 50 feet, significantly increasing officer safety standoff distance.

- **Virtual Reality (VR) Training:** The new taser system incorporates VR-based training, eliminating the need to expend physical cartridges for annual certification. VR scenarios can also include firearm transitions — practicing the shift from less-lethal to lethal force — which is a critical officer safety skill.

- **Interview Room:** The current interview room recording system through Axon would continue to be covered. A council member raised a question about echo and outside noise interference in the interview room. Chief Reid explained that Axon had conducted a sound study during setup and recommended sound-dampening foam panels, which can be configured decoratively. Axon can also make some adjustments on their side through microphone calibration, as the room has three microphone input locations.

- **Cloud Storage:** All camera footage and case data continues to be stored through Axon's cloud platform at no additional local storage cost.

- **Digital Court Integration:** Chief Reid noted that Long View was among the first departments in Catawba County to use Axon's digital case file submission system to the court system. The courts have now fully transitioned to digital submissions, and Axon's platform facilitates that workflow.

The contract can be paid upfront for five years or on an annual basis. The first-year cost was presented, with a breakdown showing the cost difference between annual payments and the upfront option. Alderman Hill asked for clarification on the year-over-year cost structure, and Chief Reid provided the breakdown. Chief Reid noted the prior board's decision to pay upfront had been beneficial and left that financing decision to the Board. The year-over-year cost was $93,158.89 for the first year and $96,961.00 for the following years.

6. Flock Camera Renewal and Expansion

Chief Reid spoke at length about the Flock camera system, which was implemented during the current budget year after being proposed the prior year. He described the cameras as one of the most impactful tools the department had adopted and cited several specific examples of their effectiveness:

- A drive-by shooting near Circus Hall Cream was solved within hours of the incident using Flock cameras to identify the vehicle. The suspect was located and charged. Chief noted that no one was struck in the shooting and credited Flock as the pivotal tool in the resolution.
- A second drive-by shooting on 33rd Street was also resolved with Flock camera assistance. The suspect traveled toward Burke County near the airport and was apprehended.
- A stolen vehicle was tracked by Flock cameras into Virginia, where it was recovered and returned.

Chief Reid explained that Flock uses AI-powered license plate recognition and vehicle characteristic analysis, allowing officers to search for vehicles based on minimal descriptions (e.g., "white car") without needing a complete tag number. The system operates on a national network, making it useful in inter-jurisdictional investigations. The department recently received approval to receive automatic alerts when a stolen vehicle on their system is detected by any Flock camera nationwide.

Chief Reid identified several coverage gaps in the current four-camera network, with the area around 33rd Street and I-40 specifically cited as a high-priority gap. He described that corridor as a major transit hub for criminal activity entering and exiting the town via Interstate 40. He recommended adding cameras to improve coverage and requested funding for additional cameras and the software subscription.

7. New Patrol Vehicles

Chief Reid requested funding for replacement patrol vehicles. He noted the department currently has only one spare marked patrol vehicle, creating significant operational risk if multiple vehicles experience mechanical issues simultaneously. He identified two marked patrol vehicles at or over 100,000 miles that were approaching the end of their useful patrol lifespan.

He described the transition from Dodge Chargers to Ford Police Interceptor Explorers as a positive development, citing far fewer mechanical issues with the Explorers. He noted a recent example of a Charger requiring a used motor replacement at a cost of $5,000. Chief described the hybrid Ford Police Interceptor Explorer as the preferred replacement vehicle, noting the hybrid electric motor actually enhances mid-range to top-end acceleration — a point he confirmed with Officer Fredrickson, who had been transitioned to the hybrid model and preferred it strongly. Chief Reid confirmed the hybrids are all-wheel drive. He noted that battery replacement typically becomes a concern around 200,000 miles, which is well beyond the department's typical replacement threshold of 100,000 miles.

Chief Reid also flagged the department's K9 patrol vehicle — a specialized unit with a dog cage and prisoner transport capability — as one he wanted to preserve with low mileage so it would be ready if the department revisits the K9 program in the future. He stated he intended to avoid wearing it out on routine patrol before a dog is assigned.

The price presented was for fully outfitted patrol vehicles, including all external lighting, vehicle graphics, interior cage, and console — described as "turn key" and ready for immediate patrol deployment.

8. Animal Services Vehicle

Chief Reid requested replacement of the current animal services vehicle — a 14-year-old truck that Chief described as significantly past its useful life. The vehicle experiences unexpected shutdowns, malfunctioning headlights and taillights, and a non-functional odometer. Animal Services Officer Lail was cited as having spent considerable time keeping the vehicle operational. Chief noted the vehicle had also been intermittently used as a canine patrol vehicle.

Following consultations with multiple vendors and other agencies familiar with animal control operations, Chief Reid identified a van as the most appropriate replacement. He outlined the advantages of a van:

- Climate-controlled interior, allowing safe transport of animals in extreme heat or cold. Chief noted the current truck's rear bed only has a small fan — insufficient on hot days — sometimes forcing Officer Layer to delay pickups out of concern for animal welfare.

- Greater storage capacity for both animals and equipment — able to accommodate multiple small animals in interior kennels while also having external rear kennels for larger animals.
- Longer expected service life compared to a patrol vehicle, since it is not subjected to the same constant use and wear.

The cost included the vehicle base price (available on state bid pricing with additional discounts), plus kennel outfitting, lighting, and striping — estimated at approximately $40,000 for everything combined. The Town Manager jokingly noted that one council member's expression suggested she was ready to advocate personally for the animal services vehicle.

9. Oscar Cam (3D Crime Scene Camera)

Chief Reid presented a request from the Criminal Investigation Division for an Oscar Cam, a 3D crime scene documentation camera. He explained that traditional crime scene photography requires an officer to manually photograph every angle of each room — potentially hundreds of photographs over one to two hours for a small house.

The Oscar Cam, which Chief Reid learned about through the Caldwell County Sheriff's Department, uses a tripod-mounted sensor to capture a complete 3D image of a room in a single placement. The camera then generates a gridded map of the space, and multiple room maps can be combined to produce a complete walkthrough of an entire structure. The system can also be deployed outdoors for fatality crash reconstruction or inside vehicles for incident documentation. The full 3D map can be presented in VR format on a computer — allowing prosecutors, judges, and juries to virtually walk through the scene.

Chief Reid noted that Burke County had been using the Oscar Cam and that district attorneys had reported significant benefits during trial presentations. He cited an improvement in conviction rates attributable in part to the quality and completeness of the scene documentation. The request included the camera unit itself, the mapping software, and a tablet for use on scene.

10. Radar Unit Replacement

Chief Reid requested funding to replace two malfunctioning radar units. The department currently uses the Python 3 radar from MPH Industries. He noted that the Python 3 has been on the state-approved radar list but has been discussed multiple times as a candidate for removal due to its age and older technology. Under North Carolina law, only radar units approved by Training Standards may be used by officers.

Two current units are non-functional due to failed speakers — a component required for the "Doppler tone" that helps officers judge vehicle speed. Even though the units can still track vehicle speed, the non-functional speaker renders them legally unusable.

Chief Reid requested replacing the two malfunctioning units with the MPH Industries B3 radar, the same manufacturer's newer model. Advantages of the B3 include:

- Moving mode capability — the ability to clock a vehicle in front of the officer's moving patrol vehicle (the Python 3 cannot do this in following mode).
- Reduced likelihood of clocking the wrong vehicle.
- Lock-on mode that fixes on a specific target vehicle.
- Same-direction and opposite-direction tracking, as well as stationary mode.

The cost for two B3 radar units was presented. Chief Reid noted that repairing the old units could cost $200 to $1,000 per unit depending on the malfunction, making replacement the more financially sound choice.

11. Patrol Rifles — Replacement and Spare Stock

Chief Reid requested funding for three patrol rifles to replace aging units and build a small stock of spares. He explained that all officers are currently equipped with patrol rifles, which he described as essential — noting he found it inconceivable that some local agencies still do not equip their officers with rifles. He provided the rationale: officers train with pistols to an effective range of 25 yards (75 feet), but AR-style rifles are common in the general public and can engage targets at much greater distances with greater penetrating power. Meeting a rifle threat with a pistol is not tactically sound.

Chief Reid described the department's current rifle inventory as a "hodgepodge" of various manufacturers and ages, including Turner Armament, Saint Victor, Colt, Palmetto, and Smith & Wesson rifles. Some Smith & Wessons were purchased 10 to 15 years ago; one Colt was described as very old. Chief explained that rifles wear out through training use — barrels and actions degrade over time — and that unlike some components, serialized barrel assemblies cannot simply be swapped between serialized lowers, as the state will not recognize mismatched serial numbers.

The requested three rifles would replace the oldest units and provide a small reserve so that an officer whose assigned rifle is sent for repair or maintenance is not left without a functional patrol rifle. Chief noted the department could not justify fielding a firearm whose reliability was in question.

12. Computers

Chief Reid requested five additional computers, consisting of four desktop units and one laptop. He noted the council had approved five computers the prior year, and the remaining need had not yet been addressed. He reported exploring a leasing option as suggested in the prior year but concluded it was not financially beneficial for the relatively small quantity of computers involved — the per-unit cost difference between leasing and outright purchasing was minimal. The department had worked with Mrs. Shirley in IT to find an appropriate vendor, and the cost per unit had been cut to nearly half of what it would have been at previous pricing levels. The total cost for all five units was presented.

13. Protective Shields

Chief Reid requested funding for three additional protective shields to build on the two shields previously approved. He reported that the two existing shields had been deployed in active critical incidents. However, with only two shields for the entire department, officers sometimes do not have immediate access to one on their shift. His plan was to assign one shield per shift to the shift supervisor or a designated officer, with an additional shield available for the school resource officer.

Chief Reid noted he had researched alternative shield models and found options that offer the same level of protection — including rifle-stopping capability — at a significantly lower cost than the shields purchased the prior year. The new shields are a hard-construction design rather than the flexible design used previously but offer equivalent ballistic protection. The cost for three shields was substantially lower than the equivalent purchase would have been the prior year.

Priority Order for Budget Cuts

Chief Reid acknowledged that he was making substantial requests and that the town had limited resources. He presented a prioritized list at the end of his packet, instructing the council that if cuts were necessary, they should start from the bottom of the list. He stated that the items at the top represented the highest-priority needs for officer safety and community protection.

Chief Reid concluded by thanking the council for their time, expressing confidence in the department's direction, and inviting any questions.

Break

Long View Fire Department and Risk Management

Risk Management Presentation — Captain Alex Smith

Captain Smith delivered the risk management portion of the presentation on behalf of the Long View Fire Department's risk management function.

Workers' Compensation Overview

Captain Smith opened by referencing the OSHA 29 CFR 1904 recordkeeping requirement, which mandates that employers record work-related fatalities, injuries, and illnesses. For the 2025 calendar year, the town had five workers' compensation claims, two of which fell within the current FY2025–2026 budget year. For the 2026 calendar year to date, there had been three additional workers' comp claims, bringing the total for the current budget year to five claims.

Captain Smith noted that in July of the prior year, the town transitioned from Travelers Insurance to the League of Municipalities for workers' compensation coverage. He reported that while there were some initial growing pains in the communication process between the League and the town as the employer, he believed those issues had been resolved. He acknowledged that a couple of the claims had been more complex — requiring extended recovery periods beyond a simple ER or urgent care visit — but indicated the coordination process was working better.

Recent Safety Purchases

Captain Smith highlighted several safety-related purchases made during the current budget year to support departments:

- **Police Department:** Eye and ear protection for the shooting range (safety glasses and ear muffs), and traction devices for shoes.
- **Public Works:** Eye and ear protection, per Director Chris Eckert's request.
- **Fire Department:** Eye and ear protection and traction devices for on-duty personnel.

Captain Smith expressed particular pride in reporting that the department came through both a snowstorm and an ice storm during the current year without any workers' compensation claims, crediting the traction devices and other safety measures as contributing factors.

OSHA Standards Overview by Department

Captain Smith provided a brief overview of the applicable OSHA standards for each of the town's operational departments:

- **Public Works:** Falls primarily under 29 CFR 1926 (construction industry) and 29 CFR 1910 (general industry). Key requirements include mandatory fall protection, trench safety (shoring panels for below-grade work), confined space entry permits, hazard communication, and appropriate PPE including safety vests, eye protection, and hearing protection.

- **Police Department:** Falls under 29 CFR 1910 (general industry). Key focus areas include blood-borne pathogen training, hazardous materials awareness, and PPE such as eye and ear protection and safety vests. Captain Smith noted that annual in-service training covers much of this required training.

- **Fire Department:** Falls under both 29 CFR 1910 (general industry) and 29 CFR 1910.156 (fire brigade standard). Key OSHA areas for fire include blood-borne pathogens, hazardous materials, SCBA standards, bunker/turnout gear standards, and wildland PPE. Captain Smith noted that OSHA recently incorporated 22 NFPA standards into its fire brigade regulations, two of which were particularly notable:

- **NFPA 1582 (Medical Examinations):** Captain Smith proudly noted that Long View Fire Department had been conducting annual physicals that meet or exceed the NFPA 1582 standard for years — well before it was formally incorporated into OSHA. The physicals include cancer risk screening and pulmonary function testing.

- **NFPA 1407 (Rapid Intervention Crews):** Requires that a plan and personnel be in place to rescue downed firefighters during a fire incident.

- **29 CFR 1910.134 — Two-In/Two-Out Rule:** Captain Smith described this longstanding OSHA rule, which requires that when two firefighters enter an IDLH (Immediately Dangerous to Life and Health) environment, two additional personnel must be standing by on the exterior — separate from the rapid intervention team — available to respond if those interior firefighters need rescue.

Department of Labor Inspection Risk

Mayor Marlowe raised the question of how many workers' compensation claims it takes to trigger a Department of Labor inspection. Captain Smith acknowledged the concern and noted it is difficult to give a precise threshold. He referenced a prior experience shared by former Police Chief Bates in which approximately five claims triggered an inspection that arrived two years later. He stated he had already made Police Chief Reid aware that the current claim volume could be approaching the threshold for triggering an inspection. Captain Smith confirmed that he and Human Resources Director Sidney Shirley were planning to attend one of PD's upcoming command staff meetings to review OSHA records and ensure all documentation — including Hepatitis forms, training records, and driver records — were in order.

He also noted that the League of Municipalities provides access to a risk consultant who can conduct a mock inspection, which the town would consider utilizing to ensure full compliance before any official inspection occurs.

Budget Request

Captain Smith stated he was requesting no additional funding for the upcoming budget year and asked only to maintain the current risk management budget of **$32,150**.

Long View Fire Department Presentation

Chief James Brinkley and Deputy Chief Tyler Keener

Chief Brinkley opened the fire department's presentation by providing context and framing for the budget requests. He indicated the presentation would cover 2025 response data, the FY budget request, and a forward-looking discussion. He noted the importance of data in making sound decisions: "You have to know where you've been to know where you're going."

2025 Response Statistics — Deputy Chief Keener

Deputy Chief Keener presented the 2025 response data:

- **Total Calls for Service:** 943 requests for service — a steady, continuing increase year over year.
- **Structure Fires:** 17 structure fires, noted as a relatively high density for the size of the fire district.
- **Overlapping Calls:** 40 incidents where more than one emergency was occurring simultaneously within the fire district.

Deputy Chief Keener described overlapping calls as the department's most significant operational threat. When the primary unit is committed to a call and a second incident occurs, the department's options are: (1) deploy the ladder truck staffed by a single person to handle the second call, or (2) request mutual aid from a neighboring department — typically Icard Township or the Hickory Fire Department — to respond in Long View's place. In either scenario, Long View citizens experience a delayed response and may receive service from a department over which Long View has no control over training, protocols, or level of care.

Deputy Chief Keener emphasized that even when the ladder truck responds to an overlapping call, it is staffed by one person expected to perform the work of three. He noted the department had begun tracking in 2026 which organization — the second Long View company, Icard Township, or Hickory — is handling each overlapping call, with the intent to have a comprehensive breakdown by the end of calendar year 2026.

Alderman Hill asked whether calls responded to outside the district are tracked in the same numbers. Deputy Chief Keener explained that if Long View responds to a mutual aid call in another district, those calls are included in the department's totals. However, when a mutual aid department responds in Long View's place because Long View is unavailable, those calls cannot be entered into the national reporting system and are only tracked on paper.

Alderman Bumgarner asked about minimum staffing requirements. Deputy Chief Keener explained that NFPA recommends four personnel on a pumper, though many departments operate with three due to budget constraints, which is what Long View currently does. Chief added that ISO (Insurance Services Office) requires a pumper and four people on scene before certain insurance-rating thresholds are triggered, and that OSFM (Office of State Fire Marshal) can place a department on probation if standards are not maintained, ultimately resulting in an ISO Class 10 rating (no fire protection), which would increase insurance rates for all property owners in the district.

Budget Request — Three Full-Time Firefighters for Ladder Company

Chief Brinkley presented the department's primary budget request: the addition of three full-time firefighters to staff the ladder company. He explained the operational rationale:

- **Current Situation:** The department currently schedules four personnel per shift, with a minimum of three permitted by policy. The moment any one person takes off, the department falls below the response guidelines set by the Department of Insurance. When at the minimum of three, the ladder truck is grounded — it cannot be deployed unless an additional person returns to duty or a firefighter from the primary engine is reassigned, which weakens the primary response capability.
- **Goal:** Moving to five on duty with a minimum of four would ensure that when someone takes time off, the department still meets the DOI response standard. It would also keep both the engine and the ladder truck on the road simultaneously.
- **ISO Impact:** The department received a negative mark on its most recent ISO inspection for failing to regularly deploy the ladder truck. The ladder truck is essential given Long View's industrial base and the need for elevated master streams.
- **OSHA Two-In/Two-Out Compliance:** With only three people on a fire scene, the department cannot meet the OSHA two-in/two-out rule. The engineer operating the pump panel cannot be reassigned, the officer and one firefighter enter the structure, and there is nobody on the outside to assist if something goes wrong. Adding a second crew on the ladder truck would provide the personnel necessary to meet this safety standard.

- **Overtime vs. Hiring:** Chief Brinkley presented a comparative analysis prepared with the assistance of Finance Director Melissa Lalonde. He noted that maintaining the current minimum staffing of three by using overtime to backfill when someone is absent — not counting storm responses or special events — costs approximately $135,000 annually including FICA and related costs. By contrast, hiring three full-time positions costs approximately $170,850 total. The difference is approximately $14,000 — and that gap closes quickly as soon as a single major storm response occurs.

OPS 1 Replacement Equipped/Outfitted $80,000

Chief Brinkley advised that Deputy Chief Keener's current Admin Vehicle is nearing 100,000 miles and they would like to request Deputy Chief's vehicle be replaced and outfitted with a Chevy 1500, which is what Chief Brinkley and Captain Smith drive, as well. This would ensure the safety of Deputy Chief Keener by allowing him to haul his gear in a true cab covered pick-up, minimizing Deputy Chief Keener to cancer causing carcinogens that are found to be trapped in gear after use. Supplying this vehicle would also allow for the fire department to have a spare vehicle, if needed.

SCBA Bottle Replacement

Chief Brinkley advised that the SCBA bottle replacements are on a rotating schedule. 4 breathing air cylinders are coming due for replacement this year. The cost for replacing the 4 SCBA Bottles is $6,000.00.

Recess for Lunch

At 12:44 p.m., the Board called for a recess for lunch, noting the meeting would resume at 1:30 p.m.

Resume Meeting from Recess

Mayor Marlowe called the meeting back to order, resuming from recess at 1:30 p.m.

Public Works – Sidearm Mower / Multi-Function Tractor Presentation

Public Works Director Chris Eckard presented a request for a new sidearm mower/multi-function tractor, noting it was the sole capital equipment request from his department for the year. He directed the board's attention to product information, presenting two comparable machines: the Alpha and the Aspen, manufactured by the same company, with approximately a $40,000 price difference between the two models.

Mr. Eckard explained the key features shared by both units:

- Fully enclosed cab with heat and air conditioning
- Hydrostatic drive
- Four-wheel steering, enabling the machine to turn in a very tight radius
- Shatterproof/safety glass to protect the operator from debris
- High-visibility cab offering nearly 360-degree visibility

He noted the primary difference between the two models: the Alpha's cab swivels similarly to an excavator, allowing the operator to turn and face the direction they are mowing (e.g., to the right), while using their feet for the hydrostatic drive and focusing on the work at hand. The Aspen, by contrast, does not have the swiveling cab, though it still offers excellent field of vision. Ecker acknowledged the swivel feature on the Alpha was impressive but also noted it introduces additional mechanical complexity—more grease fittings, more petroleum-based maintenance requirements, and additional components that are more susceptible to issues near water bodies such as Fry Creek.

Mr. Eckard highlighted the current equipment being used—a 1987 model Ford tractor with expanded metal over the operator for protection—and described it as potentially no longer OSHA-compliant, noting that hydraulic hose failures occur regularly, covering operators in hot hydraulic fluid. He stated that multiple members of his crew, including himself, had experienced this. He also mentioned that the enclosed nature of the new machines would eliminate risks such as operator exposure to yellow jacket nests encountered while mowing.

He walked the board through the forestry head attachment that would come standard with either machine. He described it as capable of trimming limbs, taking down trees from top to stump, and grinding the stump in place—eliminating the need for haul-off. He noted that McDonald Parkway in Hickory had recently demonstrated this capability, where a skid steer with a forestry head ground down crape myrtles to mulch in place.

Additional attachments discussed included:

- Iron brush – for cleaning sidewalks, which Ecker described as ideal for the town's ongoing sidewalk project through the center of town. He envisioned one operator running the brush while others used the vac truck to collect debris.
- River bucket / ditch bucket / grass grab – for cleaning out wet ditches and waterways such as Fry Creek, which runs through the middle of town. He explained that cleaning the pipes at Fry Creek was currently a manpower-intensive, sometimes all-day process involving chainsaws, chains, and the vac truck. The new machine's reach and attachments could accomplish the same task more efficiently with fewer personnel.
- Guardrail cleaner – an attachment that moves around each guardrail post.

Mr. Eckard noted he had intentionally not priced all attachments to avoid overwhelming the board, but proposed a phased approach: if the board approved the base machine this year, he would return in subsequent budget cycles to request one additional attachment per year. He referenced the town's Caterpillar backhoe as a model for this kind of multi-attachment investment strategy.

Pricing discussed:

- Current replacement option (new Kubota tractor and mower only, replacing like-for-like): approximately $140,000–$160,000, with limited functionality
- Alpha (swiveling cab) with forestry head: approximately $320,000
- Aspen (non-swiveling cab) with forestry head: approximately $278,000

Mr. Eckard stated that the $40,000 difference between the Alpha and the Aspen could theoretically be used to purchase one or two additional attachments for the Aspen, potentially making it the better value. He said he would have no problem approaching the vendor to negotiate—if the board was serious about the purchase, he could push for a discount or inclusion of a second attachment. A board member supported that idea, noting that if a deal could be struck, the Aspen plus two attachments could outperform the Alpha at the same or lower cost.

Alderman Bumgarner asked about the machine's road-drivability (confirmed it can be driven on public roads), safety (confirmed fully enclosed with shatterproof glass), stability on embankments (confirmed it is counterweighted), and reach (the Aspen reaches approximately mid-to-upper twenties in feet; the Alpha reaches into the mid-thirties). Both models were confirmed to be capable of reaching across Frye Creek from the bank, including at the Frye Creek Pump Station.

Mr. Eckard also noted that with the current tractor, operating the mower requires simultaneously managing a manual clutch, gas pedal, brakes, and four to six separate levers—an ergonomic challenge that has resulted in the clutch being replaced three times during his tenure. The new machines use a single joystick control. He added that the new machine would also be usable year-round, including winter months, because of the heated enclosed cab—unlike the current tractor, which sits idle for approximately six months of the year.

Mr. Eckard concluded that his crew was already enthusiastic about the Aspen, that it would be a significant safety and operational upgrade, and that he was comfortable recommending the Aspen at $278,000 with the forestry head as the best option.

Infrastructure Assessment Follow-Up (Water and Sewer System)

Alderman Hill asked Mr. Eckard for his honest assessment of the town's infrastructure condition, following a presentation from engineering consultants (McGill Associates) earlier in the day.

Mr. Eckard stated that the town's water and sewer infrastructure is in bad shape, acknowledging that the age of the system had been accurately characterized by the consultants. He stated that the system had not been updated as it should have been over the years, and that he, Town Manager Cozart, and the board had inherited a very old, outdated water system. He noted that some sections are approaching the point where repair is no longer a viable option—that crews could go out on any given day and find a section that simply needs to be replaced entirely.

Mr. Eckard identified the oldest part of town as the area from 19th Street Southwest to approximately 25th Street Place Southwest, between First Avenue and Highway 70. He explained that this area was originally served by a water tower in what is now his department's parking lot and a well under the meter building, and the system has not been significantly updated since that original infrastructure was laid. He described those lines as predominantly cast-iron water lines, clay sewer lines, brick manholes, and galvanized water lines. He noted that the state now deems galvanized lines as lead pipe, and that by 2030, the state is expected to require all galvanized lines to be removed. He expressed frustration that the town is already in the middle of a lead service line study and that the state had deemed galvanized as lead despite the town having no actual lead lines, but indicated this regulatory pressure is not going away.

On the cost estimates presented by McGill Associates, Mr. Eckard said they were close but represented worst-case scenarios, and that engineering costs were embedded in those figures. He suggested that several projects could be done without full engineering firm involvement if a trusted, competent contractor was used—citing Chad Sigman as someone he relies on regularly and who has never done the town wrong. He suggested that once the full Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) maps are received, he and Sigman could sit down and price individual street segments—for example, replacing water line from First Avenue to Third Avenue on a given street—as a way of breaking large projects into manageable annual chunks.

He also noted that the previous CIP had run its full 10-year term with none of the identified projects completed, and that the state requires a new CIP every 10 years. He expressed his belief that a phased, section-by-section approach—starting from the bottom of a street and working up, to avoid pressure problems at the connection point between new and old pipe—would be more practical than attempting large-scale replacement all at once.

He also mentioned that he had separately asked the consultants to provide pricing on a valve insertion project for the older yellow-zone area—cutting in new isolation valves at every intersection—so that the system could be isolated segment by segment for replacement without disrupting the whole system. He said he would get those numbers to the board.

He concluded that for efficiency, using a contractor like Sigman would be preferable, as a contractor could complete in one week what his crew might take three to four weeks to accomplish, using multiple pieces of equipment simultaneously.

Regarding fire hydrant costs, Eckard noted that a full hydrant replacement (hydrant, valve, and labor) now costs approximately $10,000 per hydrant through Chad Sigman, with the hydrant and valve alone costing over $5,500. He also detailed rising material costs: meter setters at approximately $300, meters at $150, boxes at $80–$100, and lids at $80–$100—totaling $800–$1,000 in materials before any line work begins. He noted he and Town Manager Cozart review tap fees every couple of years to ensure they are recovering material costs, and while they are still breaking even, it is getting close. He mentioned the town had adjusted tap fees approximately five to six years ago.

He also commented on current fuel price volatility, noting diesel at $3.13 per gallon (up from $2.80 the previous Friday), and attributed sharp fluctuations to geopolitical events and oil company pricing behavior.

Mr. Eckard noted he is planning to send a crew member to become a licensed ORC (Operator in Responsible Charge) for sewer, to create an in-house backup rather than relying on Hickory. He also noted the town now has two certified herbicide/pesticide applicators and discussed the ongoing need to address CDL licensing for employees who operate larger vehicles, noting the cost is approximately $4,000 per person and the town has not yet formally structured a CDL requirement in its hiring process.

Town Hall – Safety and Administrative Requests

Town Finance Director Melissa Lalonde and Deputy Finance Director Denise Collins presented several budget requests related to safety and administration.

Bulletproof Glass for Front Office

Ms. Collins presented a request for bulletproof/security glass for the front office area where customer-facing employees Angie and Marcelo work. The total cost for all windows—including the interior transaction counter, drive-through sides and front window, and the exterior side window—was quoted at $48,711, with two quotes received: one from Glassworks and one from Diversified Glass. Staff noted the installation could be broken into phases if the board preferred.

The request was underscored by a recent incident in which a volatile individual came into Town Hall, prompting a call to law enforcement. Police described the individual as very dangerous and instructed staff to contact dispatch immediately upon seeing him approach the building again, as he had walked out before officers could arrive. Staff noted this incident solidified the need for protective measures.

Board members discussed doing the whole installation at once or phasing it. Alderman Hill suggested that since a threat had effectively already been made, doing the full installation made more sense, and inquired about the possibility of a discount for a full project. Discussion also touched on the drive-through window and exterior window.

Panic/Emergency Alert Button

Ms. Collins presented a request for a hardwired panic button system to allow employees to silently summon emergency services without alerting a threatening person. The system would connect directly to dispatch with no audible alarm in the building. Costs included:

- Hardware (buttons): approximately $1,921
- One-time activation fee: $25
- Quarterly monitoring fee: approximately $81

Security Cameras for Recreation Center

Finance Director Lalonde raised the topic of upgrading security cameras at the Rec Center, noting a past incident where existing cameras were insufficient to provide usable footage to law enforcement. A question was also raised by Alderman Hill about whether any Town Hall cameras had line of sight to the ATM location nearby, to which it was confirmed that there are.

Security cameras for the Recreation Center were also included in the recap at a cost of $7,071.

Christmas Decorations (Snowflakes)

Mrs. Lalonde noted that the town uses 41 snowflake decorations and that replacement pricing had been sought. It was noted that the last full donated by the City of Conover. Mrs. Lalonde flagged this as an item for the board's awareness in terms of future replacement planning, noting they're about $600-$800/piece to replace.

Planning Department

Finance Director Lalonde presented the planning budget, noting the town currently pays the Council of Governments (COG) $20,300 annually for the town planner's services at two half-days per week. The request was to increase her hours to one full day and one half-day per week, at an increased annual cost of $45,300.

Town Manager Cozart explained that the planner has been staying busy and is currently finalizing a new zoning ordinance expected to be ready to present to the board by the end of May. The ordinance is intended to align Long View's zoning regulations with those of comparable municipalities such as Hickory and Burke County, making the town more competitive for housing development. He noted there are developers waiting to see the outcome of the zoning update before moving forward with projects. If adopted, staff anticipates an uptick in development activity that would increase demand for planning services.

Code enforcement through WPCOG remains at $20,886 annually, which is in the second year of a three-year contract. Staff noted the total cost of contracted planning and code enforcement services remains less than what was previously paid for a full-time planner with benefits.

The total planning budget was presented at $102,094, which includes COG dues, demolition expenses, and the planner and code enforcement contracts.

Catawba Medical Center Lease Renewal

Finance Director Lalonde reported that the current lease agreement with Catawba Medical Center expires June 30 and that the medical center has notified the town they wish to renew. The current lease rate is $18,000 per year ($1,500/month).

It was noted the current lease structure places all building maintenance on the town, with the exception of heating and air issues—for which the medical center pays the first $1,000 and the town covers the rest. This arrangement had been renegotiated in a prior contract cycle; previously, the tenant handled all maintenance. Staff flagged this as something the board may wish to revisit in negotiations.

Board members discussed the lease renewal and the appropriate rate. Town Manager Cozart recalled that approximately five to six years prior, there had been interest from another party willing to pay $53,000 per year for the building, though that offer came with a long list of required improvements and demands.

Alderman Hill noted that commercial real estate prices in the area have increased significantly, referencing new apartments in downtown Hickory renting for $2,200–$2,500 per month for a two-bedroom unit. The board discussed the value of having a medical center as a community asset and a reason to maintain the relationship, but agreed the rent should be increased to reflect current market conditions and rising costs.

Alderman Hill further referenced the small size and high cost of comparable commercial space in downtown Hickory (such as Union Square) as context for what the medical center is receiving relative to the market. Another noted the tenant has its own parking and a larger facility.

After discussion, the board reached a consensus to:

- Renew the contract with Catawba Medical Center
- Increase the monthly rent to $3,000 per month ($36,000/year)
- Maintain the existing provision that the tenant pays the first $1,000, extending this on any repair, not just applicable to the HVAC system, with the town covering the remainder
- The Town Manager was directed to proceed with those terms in the new contract

Revenue Discussion

Finance Director Melissa Lalond presented a year-to-date revenue summary as of the prior Thursday.

General Fund revenues collected year-to-date: $6,202,513, broken down as follows:

- Sales tax: $1,639,828
- Property taxes: $2,454,633
- Franchise tax: $264,600
- Interest on investments: $96,024

Mrs. Lalonde noted the general fund is tracking on budget.

Utility Fund revenues: $2,247,526, broken down as:

- Water and sewer rates: $2,098,789
- Interest: $92,609

Mrs. Lalonde also noted approximately $30,000 in grant reimbursement funds are still outstanding and will be added to the utility fund once received.

Utility Rate and Fee Discussion

Deputy Finance Director Denise Collins presented proposed utility rate changes.

Water and Sewer Rates: Staff proposed a 5 percent rate increase to pass through increases received from both the city supplier and Republic Services. The current inside rate of approximately $78.40/month would increase to $82.35/month, a difference of approximately $3.95 per month. Staff noted this increase reflects only the pass-through of vendor cost increases and does not add any additional infrastructure funding. Outside-of-town-limits rates would also increase proportionally.

Customer Deposits: The current deposit is $160, set to approximate two months of minimum billing. Staff proposed increasing the deposit to $175 over the next two fiscal years to keep pace with rising rates, ensuring the deposit continues to cover two minimum bills.

Fee Schedule: No changes were proposed to the current fee schedule. Staff reported that the box truck rental at $75 is recouping its costs based on observed dump runs. Staff also noted that the late fee and cutoff fee increases approved in a prior cycle have had a measurable effect—the number of utility cutoffs has decreased since those fees were increased.

Tap Fees: Staff confirmed tap fees would remain unchanged for the current budget year, consistent with statements made by the Public Works Director and Finance Director earlier in the day.

Debt Service Overview

Finance staff presented the town's current debt obligations for the upcoming year:

General Fund:

- $48,120 annually for 7 more years
- $25,371 annually for 6 more years
- Approximately $192,000 in the current year (interest and principal) based on an amortization chart received for a newer obligation

Utility Fund:

- $12,230 annually for 6 more years
- $19,140 annually for 5 more years

Town Manager Cozart noted overall debt levels are manageable and the town is in good standing.

Insurance and Other Budget Increases

Finance Director Lalonde noted that final numbers for property/liability insurance, workers' compensation, utilities, and employee health insurance are not yet available. Staff had spoken with Marcus Abernathy at the NC League of Municipalities regarding workers' compensation and liability coverage, and anticipated those figures would be available in the portal shortly. Mr. Abernathy indicated worst case is approximately 8 percent, which staff noted would still be significantly less than what the town currently pays through Travelers. Mrs. Lalonde proposed using a 10 percent placeholder for budget planning purposes across insurance lines.

Administration Budget Requests

Finance Director Lalonde presented the following line item increases for the administration budget:

- **Town Events:** Increase to $15,000 to accommodate additional events at Town Hall now that the facility is no longer being rented out
- **Dues and Subscriptions:** Increase to $7,000, covering required professional dues (clerk, finance), software subscriptions such as Adobe, and similar recurring obligations
- **Travel and School:** Increase requested to cover required continuing education and certification conferences, and to begin incorporating new HR employee Sidney Shirley into professional development activities

Employee Compensation – Cost of Living Adjustment and Salary Study (Public Works)

Finance Director Lalonde and Town Manager Cozart presented information on employee compensation for the upcoming budget year, focusing particularly on the Public Works Department following a salary study conducted during the year.

Town Manager Cozart noted that in recent prior years, salary adjustments had been made for the police and fire departments to improve competitiveness with other municipalities. He stated that elected officials had brought to his attention the need to look at public works compensation as well.

The salary study results were presented to the board.

Town Manager Cozart explained that Chris Riley's larger recommended increase reflects the fact that he absorbed building maintenance responsibilities previously handled by Alan after Alan's retirement.

It was emphasized that these figures are study recommendations only and are not advocacy for any specific action, also noting that if the board approves an across-the-board cost of living adjustment (COLA), the gap between current salaries and the study benchmarks would narrow, but not close entirely without additional targeted increases.

Total additional cost to bring all affected employees to study benchmarks:

- At 3 percent COLA: approximately $30,050 in additional targeted increases above the COLA
- At 4 percent COLA: approximately $27,319 in additional targeted increases above the COLA

Mayor Pro Tempore/Alderman Lingerfelt noted that Public Works Director Eckard's recommended jump is significant. It pointed out that Mr. Eckard currently earns less than the lowest paid deputy department heads at the town, and that he has approximately 27 years of experience. Alderman Hertzel suggested trying to find a "happy median," such as bringing him to $85,000, while another expressed the view that the full increase is warranted given his tenure and responsibility level.

Discussion also addressed potential internal equity concerns—the perception among employees if one person receives a large increase while others receive only a COLA. Several board members suggested a middle path: rather than bringing each individual to their exact study-recommended salary in one year, the town could distribute a flat dollar amount evenly across hourly public works employees in addition to the COLA, with the rationale that an extra $2,500 plus a 3–4 percent raise would be well-received by staff without creating large disparities. It was also noted, however, that this approach would continue to leave the town behind market on starting wages, making it harder to attract quality candidates.

The Town Manager and Finance Director asked the board to give direction on the COLA percentage so staff could refine the numbers and bring a complete recommendation back at a future work session. Mayor Pro Tempore/Alderman Lingerfelt suggested 3 percent, while all others leaned toward 4 percent, noting the rising cost of living for employees. The majority of the board sided with 4% COLA.

The Town Manager also raised the matter of the Powell Bill fund, noting the current balance of $858,210 is above what is recommended and that the state discourages excessive accumulation of unspent Powell Bill funds. He noted that Public Works has a backlog of capital projects that will draw down that balance.

Budget Recap – All Departments

Finance Director Lalonde conducted a verbal recap of budget decisions made during the retreat across departments.

Public Works

- Sidearm mower (Aspen model with forestry head): $278,000 — **approved by consensus**

Police Department

The following items were discussed and decided upon:

- Vest Replacements: $2,000- approved
- Axon Contract: $93,158.89 approved for annual renewal.
- Patrol Car: One patrol car approved $70,438.00
- ACO Vehicle: $93,950, suggested to find cheaper outfitting costs.
- Flock Camera system: Not approved this year.
- Training Budget: Increase of $3,000. - Approved.
- Computers: Approval of 4 new desk tops: $4,000
- Narcotic Investigator Position: Denied.
- Ballistic Shields: Approval of 2 shields: $1,350
- Radars: Denied.
- Rifles: One Rifle approved: $1,625
- Overtime Budget Increase: Denied.
- OSCR Camara: Denied, unless can be funded by a grant.

Fire Department

- SCBA $6,000- Approved
- 3 new positions $170,850.00- Approved
- Chevy 1500 OPS1: $80,000- New quote to be obtained. Pending Board Approval.

Town Hall / Administration

- Bulletproof glass: $18,337.00 Front Counter Only- Approved
- Panic buttons: $1920.65- Approved
- Recreation center cameras: $7,071- Approved

Senior Day Event

- Mrs. Lalonde noted that last year the budget was increased from $2,500 to $5,000 for senior day and that it has been working well. No changes to the budget.

Transit System Discussion

Mayor Marlowe raised the topic of micro-transit service for Long View, noting he had recently met with representatives to discuss what transit options might fit the town. He explained that a micro-transit system had been identified as the most feasible and least expensive option, involving an on-demand van service where riders call one day ahead, a van picks them up at their home within a defined service zone, and drops them at the nearest major bus stop (such as the stop on 17th Street SW or at Hilltop NW) to connect to the broader Hickory regional bus system.

The mayor noted:

- Approximately 15 percent of children enrolled in a local childcare/education program held in town on Wednesdays (and throughout the summer) cannot attend due to lack of transportation
- The service would also help residents travel to employment within and outside of Long View
- A pilot program in Caldwell County had started small and grown significantly
- Estimated cost: approximately $10,000–$20,000 per year, year-to-year contract
- The town previously had a twice-weekly bus service through Greater Hickory Cooperative Christian Ministries which saw zero ridership because it only served one location (in front of a local ministry), making it impractical for most residents

The mayor acknowledged this was an emerging topic and that Long View is growing in industrial activity, making a transit system increasingly important for workforce access. He noted that without transportation infrastructure, industrial employers may be deterred. He asked the board to consider it as a potential budget item.

No formal action was taken; the item was introduced for awareness and future consideration.

Closed Session Pursuant to N.C. General Statute 143-318.11(6)

The Town Clerk advised the board that a motion was needed to enter closed session, after which the board would return to open session to formally adjourn.

> *At 4:00 p.m. motion was made by Mayor Pro Tempore/ Alderman Gary Lingerfelt and seconded by Alderman Allen Bumgarner to enter into closed session pursuant to N.C. General Statute 143-318.11(6) to discuss a personnel matter. The motion carried unanimously.*

At 4:19, a motion was made by Alderman Phyllis Pennington to re-enter open session. The motion was seconded by Alderman Allen Bumgarner. The motion to re-enter open session was unanimous.

Adjournment

At 4:20 p.m. a motion was made by Mayor Pro Tempore/Alderman Gary Lingerfelt and seconded by Alderman Allen Bumgarner to adjourn the meeting. The motion to adjourn was unanimous.