

**MINUTES OF THE TOWN OF FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
AUGUST 3, 2026**

THE FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL held a regular meeting on Monday, August 3, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. in the Town Hall Board Room located at 95 East Main Street Franklin, NC.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Stacy Guffey called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. with the following members present – Vice Mayor Mike Lewis and Council Members: Joe Collins, Travis Higdon, Rita Salain, Robbie Tompa, and Jeff Berry.

Prior to proceeding with the agenda, Mayor Guffey read aloud a quote from a local journalist praising the transparency of the Franklin Town Council and the dedication of its members, staff, police chief, and town employees, noting that he believed every word to be true.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Vice Mayor Mike Lewis.

3. ADOPTION OF THE AUGUST 3, 2026 TOWN COUNCIL AGENDA

Vice Mayor Mike Lewis made a motion, seconded by Council Member Jeff Berry to approve the Town Council Agenda for August 3, 2026 as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.

4. APPROVAL OF THE CONSENT AGENDA FOR AUGUST 3, 2026

- A.) Approval of the Minutes
 - 1. July 6, 2026 Regular Meeting Minutes
 - 2. July 14, 2026 Special Called Meeting Minutes
- B.) Budget Amendment

Council Member Rita Salain made a motion, seconded by Council Member Travis Higdon to approve the consent agenda August 3, 2026 meeting, as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.

5. INTRODUCTION/RECOGNITION

- A.) Brian Tallent, Wastewater Treatment Operator - introduction by Jason Hopkins, Wastewater Treatment Plant Supervisor/ORC
- B.) Jake Slagle, Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator, received Wastewater Lab Analyst 11 Certification -presented by Jason Hopkins, Wastewater Treatment Plant Supervisor/ORC
- C.) Jeff Shuler, Water Treatment Plant Operator received C Surface Certification - presented by Kyle Pocquette, Water Treatment Plant Supervisor/ORC
- D.) Pedro Ruiz, Water Treatment Plant Operator, received Plant Maintenance Technologist I - presented by Kyle Pocquette, Water Treatment Plant Supervisor/ORC
- E.) Kyle Pocquette, Water Treatment Plant Supervisor/ORC, received Plant Maintenance Technologist presented by Bill Deal, Public Works Director

- F.) Chris Waldroop, Streets Supervisor received OSHA Manager of Environmental, Safety and Health (MESH) Certification -presented by Bill Deal, Public Works Director

6. PRESENTATION

- A.) Quarter Cent Sales Tax Referendum- Former Mayor Jack Horton and Commissioner Gary Shields
Former Mayor Jack Horton and Eric Haggart, presented on behalf of the volunteer committee formed in November 2025 to educate the public about the upcoming referendum. Mr. Horton provided historical context and he noted that every other county in the region has now passed this referendum, leaving Macon County as the sole holdout. He also explained the practical meaning of the tax increase: for every \$4 spent, the consumer pays one additional penny.

Mr. Horton noted that the county's current annual budget of just under \$70 million depends heavily on property taxes and sales taxes, with the latter generating approximately \$14 million annually. He explained that the 0.25-cent increase is projected to generate over \$2 million per year, equivalent to 2 full cents on the property tax rate, and that in the current budget year, the county had been forced to appropriate \$3 million from its fund balance to cover one-time needs, a practice that cannot be sustained indefinitely. If the referendum passes in November and the Board of County Commissioners approves a resolution by December, revenue would begin arriving in April 2027.

Mr. Haggart outlined the broad range of allowable uses for the funds, including law enforcement, fire departments, EMS, senior services, animal shelter operations, capital improvements, and education. The committee acknowledged that the ballot language is dictated by state law and cannot be modified to specify intended uses.

Discussion was held by Town Council and the consensus was to vote on a Resolution of Support at a future meeting.

- B.) Franklin TDA – Strategic Plan – Chairman Tim Crabtree and Subcommittee Chair Colin McGinnis
TDA Chairman Tim Crabtree presented the Franklin Tourism Development Authority's new strategic plan, developed by a subcommittee that included Town Manager Amie Owens, Council Member Robbie Tompa, and several TDA Board members.

The plan establishes a 1-, 3-, and 5-year framework organized around four areas: funding optimization, infrastructure, event support, and marketing. Guiding principles include making Franklin a premier destination in Western North Carolina and the Southeast, with an emphasis on collaboration among the TDA, the Chamber of Commerce, the county's Tourism Development Commission, Visit Smokies, the Highlands TDA, and town staff and Town Council.

On infrastructure, Crabtree outlined potential investments in welcome signage, directional totems, murals, and sculptures. He noted that while TDA funds cannot be spent on utilities infrastructure, they may be used on public-facing amenities such as bathrooms, parking enhancements, and beautification.

On marketing, Stewart described the shift in strategy from "Discover Franklin" to "Experience Franklin," reflecting the belief that awareness has been established and the focus should now be on converting interest into visitation and overnight stays. He highlighted the importance of adapting to emerging AI-driven changes in search optimization, using collaborative social media

amplification through partners like Visit Smokies, and conducting targeted outreach based on research into visitor motivations.

TDA Chairman Crabtree clarified that the TDA is not moving away from funding local events, but rather seeking to ensure that funded events demonstrate a genuine tourism impact. New application requirements will ask organizers to estimate tourist volume, provide detailed budgets, and report back on outcomes including attendee zip codes.

Mayor Guffey and Council Member Tompa both thanked the subcommittee members for their work and commitment to strategic planning.

7. PUBLIC SESSION

Dave Linn addressed the Council to thank them for their continued support of a community event held downtown, the 80's Flashback Weekend. He reported that since the event's first year (raised \$500 with 53 attendees) the event has grown dramatically, raising \$36,000 in the most recent year with an estimated attendance of 7,000 or more over the course of the event. He credited town staff, specifically naming Town Manager Amie Owens and Councilman Jeff Berry, for their support, and expressed enthusiasm for the following year.

8. ITEMS FROM COUNCIL

- A) Resolution of the Town Council for the Town of Franklin to Designate the Town of Franklin as a Purple Heart Community Mayor Stacy J. Guffey

Gregory Hunt addressed the Council following the reading, sharing that Macon County has the highest per capita veteran population in North Carolina at 9.7% of residents; approximately 2,994 registered veterans. Mr. Hunt also unveiled the new Purple Heart community signs for the first time publicly; to be placed at each of Franklin's five entrances. He described the Purple Heart as a medal that is "not won, but awarded" to those who left part of themselves on the battlefield.

- B.) Proclamation Recognizing the Town of Franklin as a Purple Heart Community and Observance of August 7, 2026 as Notational Purple Heart Day- Mayor Stacy J. Guffey

Mayor Guffey read the proclamation aloud and asked members who were veterans to come forward for a photograph.

- C.) Proclamation Recognizing August 28, 2026 as 828Vets Day – Mayor Stacy J. Guffey

Bill Garren, representing 828 Vets, addressed the Town Council, explaining that the organization had moved its anniversary celebration from October to August 28th to align with the "828" identity. He outlined plans for the day, including morning programming on the square with coffee and donuts, a Warriors Walk, a cookout, and an afternoon social at a local venue. He also announced a special guest, Captain Frank Castellano commanding officer of the USS Bainbridge during the Captain Phillips Somali pirate incident, who will serve as the day's keynote speaker.

- D.) Proclamation Recognizing September 13-19, 2026 as Help Homeless Veterans Week- Mayor Stacy J. Guffey

A representative of the Help Homeless Veterans addressed the Council, reporting that the organization has raised over \$80,000 total for veterans since its founding, with approximately

\$34,000 donated to 828 Vets over the past two to three years, including \$12,000 in the most recent year alone.

E.) Main Street Update – Mayor Stacy J. Guffey

Mayor Guffey introduced Devon Dupuis as the newly appointed part-time Executive Director of the Main Street nonprofit, Main Street Franklin, LLC, acknowledging that the role has effectively become full-time work. Mrs. Dupuis thanked the Town Council and provided a brief overview of the organization's first-year annual work plan. She described the focus of Year 1 as building the foundational infrastructure of the nonprofit: pursuing grant funding connections, forming committees, assembling community volunteers and stakeholders, articulating a shared vision, and building upon existing resources and programs. She expressed enthusiasm for the work ahead.

Council Member Tompa noted his desire to work with Mayor Guffey in the coming months on initiatives specifically aimed at young people and families, stating that a number of ideas already exist and need to move to implementation. Mayor Guffey echoed this sentiment, noting that young people and families have consistently emerged as a priority theme across the Main Street initiative, the economic development plan, and the town's transformation plan; citing interest in amenities such as a bowling alley and skating rink.

The Council took a brief recess and returned to session at 7:30 p.m.

9. PUBLIC HEARING

A.) Public Hearing on Monday, August 3, 2026 at 6:05 p.m. or as closely thereafter to gain public input on Rezoning of 1.10 Acres at 85 Maple Street from Commercial C-2 to Commercial C-2 Conditional Zoning – Fire Chief/Town Planner Justin Setser

Fire Chief/Town Planner Justin Setser presented the application for conditional rezoning of 1.10 acres located at 85 Maple Street, owned by OHNC LLC. The property, situated directly behind the fire department, currently contains two homes; the applicant seeks to add two duplex units, requiring a conditional rezoning to allow for higher density than is permitted by standard C-2 zoning. Mr. Setser noted that the Planning Board reviewed and recommended approval in May following a neighborhood meeting. Mr. Setser also noted that the site is served by Town water and sewer. Agreed-upon conditions include zero lot lines between duplex units, reduced side setbacks from 10 feet to 5 feet, and a commitment to accommodate any future town-initiated sidewalk installation on the property.

Town Attorney John Henning, Jr. characterized the application as a strong example of conditional zoning working as intended to increase in-town housing density in alignment with the goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Setser noted that the application contemplates a future possibility of 4 to 8 total units on the upper portion of the property but that the immediate plan is limited to the two duplex units on the lower portion. Council Member Salain confirmed that any future development exceeding standard zoning parameters would require a return to the Council.

Mayor Guffey opened the Public Hearing at 7:36 p.m.

No one signed up to speak.

Mayor Guffey closed the Public Hearing at 7:36 p.m.

Vice Mayor Mike Lewis made a motion, seconded by Council Member Robbie Tompa to approve the Conditional Rezoning request of 1.10 Acres at 85 Maple Street from Commercial C-2 to Commercial C-2 Conditional Zoning, as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.

10. OLD BUSINESS

A.) Consider the waiver of continuing use fees for Southwestern Community College – Town Council and Town Manager Amie Owens

Town Manager Amie Owens recapped that at the July 6, 2026 meeting, the Town Council had unanimously waived system development and availability fees for Southwestern Community College's Burn Building. The College had subsequently requested a waiver of ongoing usage fees, which was tabled pending further review.

Town Manager Owens presented three options: billing at the standard inside rate of \$285.37 per month; billing at the outside rate of \$561.21 per month; or installing a hydrant meter to measure actual usage and billing at the discounted inside volume rate of \$5.28 per 1,000 gallons (compared to the standard bulk water rate of \$8.10 per 1,000 gallons).

Town Manager Owens recommended against a full fee waiver, noting that the cost of treating and delivering water must be recovered and that waiving fees for one entity places the burden on other residential and commercial customers. She noted that the county is currently paying the College's water bill.

Vice Mayor Mike Lewis made a motion, seconded by Council Member Travis Higdon to approve the option of installing a water meter to measure usage and to change the discounted inside volume rate of \$5.28/ 1,000 gallons. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6-0.

11. NEW BUSINESS

A.) Request Approval of Economic Development Incentive Grants – Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Sarah Bishop

a. Kitchen Sink, Inc.

Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Sarah Bishop reported that Kitchen Sink, Inc. had been awarded a facade grant and sign grant in the prior year but encountered installation and product quality issues with their new awning, requiring them to restart the process. The new awning and sign installation will cost significantly more than originally anticipated. Mrs. Bishop requested approval of a supplemental award of \$2,240.44, representing the balance needed to maximize the \$5,000 facade grant and \$500 sign grant, accounting for the amount already disbursed.

Town Attorney John Henning, Jr. noted that staff is developing a simple form contract

for future grants to more clearly define the town's role and provide recourse in the event of contractor issues.

Council Member Joe Collins made a motion, seconded by Vice Mayor Mike Lewis to approve the Economic Development Incentive Grant for Kitchen Sink, Inc., as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.

b. Nantahala Building Project

Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Sarah Bishop presented a facade grant request from Nantahala Building Products on Depot Street, which had already completed repainting of its building prior to the formal grant being awarded. Mrs. Bishop noted the applicant had been in contact with the Town about the grant since February and that invoices were available, but the work had been completed retroactively. The total eligible expenditure was \$8,010.26, resulting in a grant request of \$4,067.13 (50% match, capped at \$5,000 maximum).

Discussion arose regarding whether retroactive grants are appropriate given the program's intent as an incentive. Council Member Joe Collins expressed reservations, stating that the purpose of an incentive is to motivate action, not reimburse work already completed. Vice Mayor Lewis countered that the applicant had shown early interest in February, and noted that Depot Street as a whole has seen significant improvement that the Town should not discourage. The Town Council acknowledged the need to clarify policy language going forward. Mrs. Bishop agreed to review and update the program's criteria and bring proposed changes back for Town Council review.

Vice Mayor Mike Lewis made a motion, seconded by Council Member Travis Higdon to approve the Economic Development Incentive Grant for Nantahala Lumber Company, as presented. The motion carried. Vote: 4-2 (Council Members Joe Collins and Rita Salain voted in opposition).

- B.) Request Approval of new five- year contract with J&B Disposal – Town Manager Amie Owens
Town Manager Owens presented the request for a new five-year contract renewal with J&B Disposal. Bonita Hamstra, owner of J&B Disposal, was present and noted the need for contract continuity to support capital equipment financing. Town Manager Owens reported that the Town has a long and successful relationship with J&B Disposal, that the Town took over responsibility for emptying Main Street trash cans on July 1, and that the new contract rate is lower than the existing contract. Town Attorney Henning briefly explained the statutory basis for the Town's franchise arrangement with a private waste hauler.

Council Member Rita Salain made a motion, seconded by Council Member Jeff Berry to approve the five (5) year contract renewal with J&B Disposal, as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.

C.) Request Approval of award to HMC Paving Company, Inc. for multi-area paving and sidewalks – Town Manager Amie Owens

Town Manager Owens reported that an RFP for multi-area paving and sidewalks was issued twice. The first solicitation yielded only two bids and could not be opened; the second solicitation also produced two bids. The lowest responsive, responsible bid was received from HMC Paving Company, Inc. in the amount of \$635,126.99, well under the \$840,000 budgeted for the project. The primary priority for this contract will be the large parking lot at Sunnyside Park. Town Manager Owens noted that the remaining budget balance after this contract would likely allow for additional paving projects in the spring. A pavement condition study RFP is also planned.

Council Member Rita Salain made a motion, seconded by Vice Mayor Mike Lewis to approve the bid award with HMC Paving Company for the multi-area paving and sidewalk project, as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.

D.) Request Adoption of the Utility Refunds Policy- Town Attorney John Henning, Jr.

Town Attorney John Henning, Jr. presented a draft Utility Refunds Policy, developed in response to a situation addressed over the previous two months involving a request to refund tap and availability fees. He explained that there is no legal obligation to refund such fees, but that the Town Council had made a policy concession, and it was important to formalize the approach going forward.

The policy addresses two areas: (A) the refund of customer deposits upon termination of service, for those customers who were required to make a deposit due to credit considerations; and (B) the partial refund of water and sewer availability fees for residential services of 1 inch or less, where a project is abandoned after fees have been paid. Town Attorney Henning noted that larger commercial connections would not be eligible for refunds, given the Town's capital outlay associated with making that service available.

Vice Mayor Lewis raised the question of whether refund credits should be time-limited or tied to current rates, rather than allowing a credit to be applied in perpetuity against a future rate that may be significantly lower. The Town Council agreed that language addressing this concern should be added to the policy. Town Attorney Henning confirmed the policy would be revised and brought back in September.

12. DEPARTMENTAL UPDATES – PUBLIC WORKS

A.) Public Works - Bill Deal, Public Works Director

Public Works Director Bill Deal provided a comprehensive update on active and upcoming capital improvement projects. He reported that a 2-inch water line replacement on Hillside Street is underway and is being coordinated with the newly awarded paving project so that the line is installed before the street is repaved. A generator transfer switch for the Georgia Road welcome center sewer pump station has been received and will be set in place within the coming month following coordination with a gas utility. Twenty-five new fire hydrant Storg adapters have been received and are being placed in coordination with the fire department. Pump station upgrades are in progress, with two motors already received and three pumps

pending delivery. New cellular LTE water meters are being installed; which will significantly improve the Town's meter reading capabilities. He also noted that staff has cleaned over 10,000 feet of sewer line in the past quarter as part of a permit requirement. He also reported that a pre-construction meeting for the Allman Drive boardwalk project was held on July 16th with a tentative start date of mid-to-late October.

B.) Water Treatment - Kyle Pocquette, Water Treatment Plant Supervisor/ORC

Kyle Poquette reported that the water treatment plant is operating normally. Water usage remains consistent with historical levels. The Town continues to operate under a voluntary water restriction due to an extreme drought designation, which has added reporting requirements to two state agencies as well as weekly and daily reporting to the state local inspector. He noted that both settling basins have been washed and cleaned, and that the annual state inspection was completed with the inspector expressing satisfaction with the upgrade progress at the plant. Contractors are actively working on the plant upgrades.

C.) Wastewater Treatment - Jason Hopkins, Wastewater Treatment Plant Supervisor/ORC

Jason Hopkins reported that preliminary discussions are underway with Fortech regarding the installation of a new SCADA. He also reported on his role as pretreatment coordinator, noting a high volume of inquiries from new food trucks and restaurants, all of which are subject to grease trap requirements. A recent pretreatment inspection by the state resulted in no findings, confirming continued compliance. Mr. Hopkins also noted that he has taken on a new responsibility coordinating bacteriological testing for boil water advisories, including the first state inspection of that program, which went well.

D.) Streets - Chris Waldroop, Streets Supervisor

Streets Supervisor Chris Waldroop reported that right-of-way mowing with the long-arm mower is currently underway throughout Town and routine mowing, weed-eating, and beautification bed maintenance are ongoing, with a working schedule now in place for the beds in the center of town. Trash collection along Main Street is running smoothly and work at the Women's History Park and roundabouts was temporarily delayed by weather but is back underway with herbicide treatments and pruning to follow.

Mr. Waldroop reported that plumbing fixtures are being installed in the restrooms at Sunnyside Park, and paving of the walkway from the bathroom area to the playground is expected within the week. He also noted that fencing for the playground is in the purchase order process. The goal is to open the facility fully complete rather than in phases. Town Manager Owens noted that mid-September had been the target but that full inspection and completion of the ADA ramp connecting the parking lot must be accomplished before opening.

Mr. Waldroop concluded by noting that fall decoration planning will begin shortly, and that the roundabout plantings will be adjusted to accommodate both aesthetic and seasonal display needs.

13. ANNOUNCEMENTS

- A.) Special Called Meeting of Franklin Town Council - Tuesday, August 4, 2026 at 10:00 a.m. in the Town Hall Board Room
- B.) Next Town Council Meeting is Tuesday, September 8, 2026 - due to the Labor Day Holiday
- C.) Town Offices will be closed on Monday, September 7, 2026 in observance of the Labor Day Holiday in accordance with the North Carolina State Holiday Schedule
- D.) Pickin' on the Square- August 8 and August 22, 2026 -6:00 p.m. on the Gazebo Square
- E.) Special Pickin' on the Square-September 5, 2026 6:00 p.m. on the Gazebo Square with fireworks show to follow
- F.) Fall Litter Sweep for the Town of Franklin – Saturday, September 26, 2026 8:00 a.m. until Noon

14. ADJOURNMENT

Vice Mayor Mike Lewis made a motion, seconded by Council Member Robbie Tompa to adjourn the meeting at 8:19 p.m. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6-0.

Stacy J. Guffey, Mayor

Nicole Bradley, Town Clerk