MINUTES OF THE TOWN OF FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
AUGUST 4, 2026

THE FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL held a special called meeting on Tuesday, August 4, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. in the Town Hall Board Room located at 95 East Main Street Franklin, NC.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Stacy J. Guffey called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. with the following members present:
Council Members: Jeff Berry, Joe Collins, Rita Salain and Robbie Tompa.
Town Staff: Town Manager Amie Owens, Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Sarah Bishop and Town Clerk Nicole Bradley.

Mayor Guffey called the meeting to order and introduced guest presenter Joe Minicozzi. Mayor Guffey explained that the timing was particularly opportune, given the Town's ongoing efforts to develop an economic and transformation plan for downtown and its recently obtained historic district designation.

PRESENTATION

Background and Context

Mr. Minicozzi opened by recounting the decline of his hometown of Rome, New York, where he witnessed, as a child, the demolition of historic downtown buildings in favor of urban renewal projects; a reconstructed Revolutionary War fort, a pedestrian mall, surface parking, and a new city hall, which collectively failed to generate economic activity. He used this as a foundational illustration of how well-intentioned but misguided government action can devastate a community's economic fabric, including the loss of his uncle's pastry shop through eminent domain.

He then turned to Asheville, tracing its arc from rapid 1920s growth through its historic debt crisis, Depression-era collapse, urban renewal, highway construction, and eventual downtown decline, before its revival. He described this trajectory to underscore that places have a "DNA" that changes over time, and that policy choices determine the direction of that change.

Cities as Corporations

Mr. Minicozzi framed municipalities as corporations, with the council serving as a board of directors responsible for managing cash flow, assets, and tax revenue. He argued that too many local government decisions are driven by the loudest voices rather than by rigorous financial analysis, and that elected officials need to be more literate about the economics of their built environment.

Tax Productivity Per Acre

The central analytical framework of the presentation was the concept of tax productivity per acre; comparing not just the total assessed value of properties, but the value generated relative to the amount of land consumed. Mr. Minicozzi illustrated this by comparing a renovated mixed-use building in downtown Asheville (0.2 acres, assessed at $11 million) to a Walmart (34 acres, assessed at $20 million). While the Walmart appears more valuable in gross terms, the downtown building produces dramatically more value per acre. He noted that this pattern holds universally, from Driggs, Idaho, to Durham, to

Franklin, and that stacking building floors is equivalent to stacking tax revenue.
He presented three-dimensional GIS mapping models of Asheville, Buncombe County, and the broader Western North Carolina region; all of which showed the same pattern: downtown cores generate disproportionately high tax value relative to their land footprint, while sprawling, auto-oriented development along highway corridors generates comparatively little.

Franklin and Macon County Data
Mr. Minicozzi presented figures specific to Franklin and Macon County. He noted that Franklin's downtown, at approximately 70 acres, represents about 2 percent of the city's land footprint but generates approximately 9 percent of its taxable value, a ratio of roughly 1-to-4.5. He stated that a healthy downtown typically performs at a 1-to-6 ratio or better, meaning Franklin's downtown is underperforming its potential. Asheville's downtown, by comparison, performs at a 1-to-12 ratio.
He also noted that Franklin's downtown, when viewed in the context of the entire county, performs at a 1-to-40 productivity ratio; making it an extraordinary contributor to county tax revenue, despite relatively modest improvement so far. He noted that the county, which receives substantial benefit from the downtown without bearing the associated municipal service costs, has a compelling financial interest in supporting downtown investment.

Franklin's city-wide average assessed value per acre was approximately $260,000, which Mr. Minicozzi noted compares favorably to neighboring municipalities, though Sylva has a more concentrated and potent downtown spike. He highlighted Highlands as the top performer in Macon County due to its density and high-end housing market.

Big Box vs. Small Business Economics
Mr. Minicozzi compared the tax and economic output of large-format retail (Walmart) to small downtown businesses, using examples from Durango, Colorado, where a bookstore and coffee shop together occupied 0.15 acres versus a Walmart's 13 acres. On a per-acre basis, the small businesses outperformed the Walmart significantly in both property tax and sales tax productivity, and employed more people relative to their footprint. He further noted that small businesses tend to hire local attorneys, accountants, web designers, and other professionals, while chain retailers internalize those functions at their corporate headquarters.

Infrastructure Costs and the "Ponzi Scheme" of Sprawl
Mr. Minicozzi walked through an analysis of Annapolis, Maryland (population 40,000) to illustrate how the pattern of suburban expansion creates long-term infrastructure liabilities that most cities are not adequately accounting for. Roads, sewer lines, and stormwater infrastructure must be rebuilt on a roughly 50-year cycle, and cities that expanded dramatically in the post-World War II era are now facing compounding rebuild costs that far exceed their revenue base.

He described the pattern as a "Ponzi scheme," in which new development is approved to generate short-term revenue that is then used to service the infrastructure costs of prior development, with each cycle leaving the city further behind. He noted that Annapolis is operating at an infrastructure funding deficit of approximately $24 million annually, a figure that does not appear in the general budget but manifests as deferred maintenance, unfilled positions, and incomplete capital projects.
He also challenged the conventional accounting treatment of roads and pipes as assets, arguing they should be recognized as perpetual liabilities, since they cannot be sold and must be replaced repeatedly in perpetuity.

Stroads and Highway Corridor Development
Mr. Minicozzi described the concept of a "stroad", a street-road hybrid that functions poorly as both, coined by urbanist Chuck Marohn of Strong Towns. He identified U.S. Hwy 441 through Franklin as an example, noting that such corridors generate high conflict points (accidents, inefficiency) and low tax productivity relative to the infrastructure they require.

Mayor Guffey left the meeting at 10:59 a.m. for another engagement and turned over mayoral duties to former Mayor (Council Member) Joe Collins.

Assessment Equity and Redlining
In the latter portion of the presentation, Mr. Minicozzi addressed the equity dimensions of property tax assessment. He described how a standard practice among assessor's results in wealthy landowners with large tracts paying less per acre in taxes than smaller property owners, while the public infrastructure serving those large parcels (roads, water, sewer) is often more extensive.

He also presented findings from an analysis he conducted in Buncombe County related to that county's reparations initiative, which examined whether historic redlining policies continue to manifest in the property tax system. His analysis found that the bottom 40 percent of property owners by value were being systematically overtaxed relative to their assessed value, while the top 60 percent were being undertaxed. He estimated this amounted to a $7 million annual tax transfer from lower-income to higher-income residents.

For Macon County specifically, the analysis showed the bottom 30 percent of property owners face an effective tax rate approximately 20 to 30 percent higher than the top 10 percent.

Closing Framework: Geo-Accounting
Mr. Minicozzi closed by describing the analytical approach of his firm, Urban3, as "geo-accounting"; placing financial data on a map to make the economics of land use visible to both officials and citizens. He encouraged the council to use available GIS tools, engage the county assessor in transparent conversations about valuation methodologies, and pursue a partnership with Macon County to jointly invest in downtown Franklin's continued development, given the disproportionate benefit the county receives from the downtown tax base.

Discussion
Following the presentation, there was discussion on how the Town could influence the tax system given that taxing authority rests with the county rather than the municipality. Mr. Minicozzi suggested the Town explore how much county-owned land exists downtown and whether a public-private partnership with the county could be structured. He also encouraged improving pedestrian connectivity to reduce parking demand and convert surface lots to productive uses. He emphasized the importance of bringing the county to the table as a shared partner, noting the significant financial benefit they receive from the downtown.

Mr. Minicozzi noted that two additional presentations were scheduled, one that afternoon and one for the general public in the evening.

ADJOURNENT

Council Member Joe Collins made a motion, seconded by Council Member Rita Salain to adjourn at the meeting at 11:22 a.m. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 4-0.

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Stacy J. Guffey, Mayor

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Nicole Bradley, Town Clerk