

**MINUTES OF THE TOWN OF FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING WITH ABC BOARD
JULY 14, 2026**

THE FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL held a special called meeting on Tuesday, July 14, 2026, at 8:00 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 8:00 a.m. with the following members present:

Vice Mayor Mike Lewis (arrived at 8:07) Council Members: Jeff Berry, Joe Collins and Rita Salain.

Town Staff: Town Attorney John Henning, Jr, Town Manager Amie Owens, Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Sarah Bishop and Town Clerk Nicole Bradley.

ABC Board Members: Chairperson Rhonda Tallent, Rocky Pattillo, Alton Sutton (joined via phone), William Duffell and Don Willis.

ABC Store Staff: Store Manager Todd Mason.

Media Present: Bobby Coggins and Shelby Powell.

ABC Board Chair Rhonda Tallent read the North Carolina Statute 18B-201 statement; a conflict-of-interest inquiry was conducted; no conflicts were reported by any ABC Board member present.

DISCUSSION

ABC Board Chair Rhonda Tallent reported that they had published a (RFQ) Request for Qualifications for architectural/engineering services related to a proposed new or refurbished ABC store facility, and received three responses: Smiths Sinnett Architecture- Raleigh, NC, Little Diversified Architectural Consultants - Charlotte, NC, and RRMM Architects- Chesapeake, VA.

Town Attorney John Henning, Jr. clarified that an RFQ is not a bid process but rather a qualifications-based selection process used by government agencies in North Carolina, with contract negotiation occurring afterward. He noted that all three respondents were comparably qualified, with the two North Carolina firms having prior ABC store construction experience.

ABC Store Manager Todd Mason brought the group's attention to a significant development: four ABC boards across North Carolina had recently paused or withdrawn plans to build or renovate facilities, citing growing concern over the potential privatization of ABC operations statewide. He noted that the conversation around privatization is "most vocal now than it's ever been," with larger boards such as Orange County among those putting construction plans on hold.

Member Don Willis framed the central dilemma: whether to proceed with hiring an architect and potentially purchasing property, or to pause all activity given the uncertainty. Member William Duffell argued that if privatization were to occur, a new buyer would be better served by a "blank slate" property rather than one mid-construction, and that the town's best posture is to maintain current operations until there is a clearer signal from the State. He stated plainly, "It's not our money. It's your money. It's our community's money. You guys gotta decide how you wanna spend it."

The group also discussed the financial exposure the Town would carry if a building loan of \$1.5–\$2 million were taken out, only for privatization to transfer control of the ABC store away from the Town. It was noted that while the State and municipalities would still receive some revenue under a privatized model, it would be significantly less than current distributions from the ABC board.

Town Attorney John Henning, Jr. reported that Senate Bill 938, a privatization-related bill, had been filed with a single sponsor and had been sitting in committee since April 30th with no further legislative movement. He cautioned, however, that such legislation can be attached to other bills without notice. Council Member Rita Salain observed that committee-level noise does not always translate to full floor action. Vice Mayor Mike Lewis and Council Member Joe Collins both expressed the view that privatization is likely "too big of an animal to kill" given the revenue and jobs at stake, though they acknowledged uncertainty.

The discussion touched briefly on potential building sites, including two adjacent lots near the Bojangles location, which had been previously identified as a viable option due to its visibility and traffic access. No other suitable properties had been identified. Council Member Joe Collins noted that while he has long advocated for the Town/ABC Board owning its own building, he is not inclined to move forward with purchasing land and building new construction given the current climate. He indicated he might support acquiring an already-built facility at significantly reduced cost if one became available, but no such option was currently known.

Mayor Guffey proposed that the most prudent course of action was to place all planning and expenditures on hold pending direct outreach to the legislative delegation to assess the true trajectory of privatization legislation. Council Member Collins endorsed this approach, and Council Member Berry agreed that the Town should wait for more definitive answers from the State before proceeding.

Mayor Guffey indicated he would reach out to Senator Kevin Corbin and Representative Karl Gillespie immediately, and Vice Mayor Mike Lewis committed to contacting the NC League of Municipalities' legislative director for additional insight. It was agreed that if the outreach revealed significant new information warranting further discussion, the two boards would reconvene. Member Duffell sought clarification that "on hold" meant no money or resources would be spent or committed in the interim, which was confirmed.

ADJOURNMENT

Council Member Joe Collins made a motion, seconded by Council Member Rita Salain to adjourn at the meeting at 8:33 a.m. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 4-0.

Stacy J. Guffey, Mayor

Nicole Bradley, Town Clerk