

2026-08-10 Town Council Meeting

Meeting Minutes

August 10, 2026, 7:00 PM

1. Call to Order

The Mayor called the Regular Town Council Meeting to order on Monday, August 10, 2026, at 7:00 PM at Weddington Town Hall, 1924 Weddington Road, Weddington, NC 28104.

2. Determination of Quorum

A quorum was established. All Council members were present with the exception of one member (Tom), who was absent.

Present: Mayor Bell, Councilmember Darcey Ladner, Councilmember Ellen McLaughlin, Councilmember Tripp Soukup
Absent: Tom (name not fully identified in record)

3. Pledge of Allegiance

The Mayor led those in attendance in the Pledge of Allegiance.

4. Additions, Deletions and/or Adoption of the Agenda

No additions, deletions, or modifications to the agenda were proposed.

A motion to adopt the agenda as presented was made by Councilmember Ladner and seconded by ____.
The motion carried unanimously.

5. Conflict of Interest Statement

The Mayor read the Conflict of Interest Statement into the record. No Council member identified a conflict of interest with respect to any matter on the agenda.

6. Mayor/Councilmember Reports

The Mayor noted that, in the absence of the Council member who regularly provides updates from the Weddington Utility Municipal Authority (WUMA), Councilmember McLaughlin, serving as the WUMA alternate, confirmed she had not attended the most recent WUMA meeting and had not received an update.

Councilmember Ladner reported that she had been tasked with resolving three nuisance abatement matters. Two of the three issues have been resolved, and the third remains ongoing, with further work planned in coordination with Town Administrator Doug Gailey during the coming month.

Councilmember McLaughlin offered remarks regarding the Council's prior vote against conducting formal market research before advancing the proposed community park project. She reiterated her position that meaningful resident input should be gathered prior to making a major financial commitment, emphasizing that her concern was not opposition to the park itself but rather ensuring that the town understands what features residents actually want and will use. She expressed confidence that the park could foster community and promote health and well-being, provided decisions are grounded in resident feedback. Councilmember

McLaughlin also offered a welcoming statement for incoming Town Administrator Doug Gailey, noting that his arrival had already begun to reduce organizational tension and support town staff.

In response, the Mayor clarified that resident engagement and public input opportunities are planned in the coming weeks as part of the park process, and encouraged all residents to participate. He also formally noted that Town Administrator Doug Gailey would be formally welcomed and sworn in later in the meeting.

7. Public Comments

Clayton Jones, a resident of Panhandle Circle with 28 years in Weddington, addressed the Council regarding the town's Rainy Day Fund. He noted that the fund exists for unplanned emergencies and budget shortfalls, and expressed concern that it may be under consideration as a funding source for the proposed park. He stated that the LaBella Engineering cost estimate for the park was approximately \$10 million, and that informal contacts had suggested a revised figure closer to \$4.5 million — still leaving an estimated \$2 million funding shortfall when set against the available \$2.5 million federal grant. Mr. Jones recalled that he, the Mayor, and Councilmember McLaughlin had each previously pledged not to build the park using tax dollars, and he characterized the Rainy Day Fund as constituting tax dollars. He asked the Council to commit, before the meeting's adjournment, that the Rainy Day Fund would not be used to cover the park funding shortfall.

Anne Marie Cruz, a resident, raised two issues. First, she addressed the impact on families with children at Antioch Elementary School stemming from recent decisions by Union County Public Schools (UCPS). Acknowledging that the Council has no jurisdiction over UCPS, she nonetheless asked Council members to use their relationships with county officials and commissioners to advocate on behalf of affected families, noting that the Town of Waxhaw had similarly engaged on related school issues. Second, she addressed the park and the question of market research. Ms. Cruz stated that she agreed with the broad consensus that residents want a park and that the current site is the only available location at this time. She emphasized, however, that market research into the types of amenities and features residents desire — such as amphitheaters, playgrounds, and gathering spaces — remains critically important and should not be overlooked. She noted that residents have expressed concerns about cost and specific features, and she urged the Council to be more explicit as planning proceeds about what forms of community engagement will be offered and how the resulting feedback will be incorporated into the park's design.

The Mayor responded to both points. Regarding Antioch Elementary, he confirmed that he had personally contacted both UCPS and the Union County Sheriff's Office to express concerns about the logistics of the situation. He noted that Antioch Elementary is located within the Town of Indian Trail's jurisdiction, and therefore encouraged residents wishing to advocate on this issue to contact both Indian Trail officials and UCPS directly. He provided contact information for Dr. Jay Jones, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services, and Stephen Hancock, Director of Safety and Security, at UCPS. On the park, the Mayor confirmed that public input sessions are forthcoming and encouraged broad participation.

Chad Emerine, a resident of Eagle Road, raised three administrative and process concerns. First, he addressed reimbursements owed to the town for engineering review costs paid to LaBella Engineering on behalf of developers. He noted that the town's UDO requires applicants to reimburse engineering review costs, but that the current tracking system is inconsistent — charges are sometimes listed by engineer, sometimes by developer, and sometimes by address — making it difficult to reconcile what has been billed and what remains outstanding. Based on records provided to him by the Finance Officer, Mr. Emerine stated that more than \$60,000 in engineering costs had not been reimbursed, with the two largest outstanding balances being Toll Brothers at approximately \$19,000 and Keystone at approximately \$21,000. He questioned what process exists to ensure collection and noted that unreimbursed costs are ultimately borne by taxpayers. Second, Mr. Emerine raised concerns about code enforcement and stormwater compliance, citing more than 40 issues identified during construction of Enclave at Baxley with no fines issued, as well as ongoing concerns at Luna and Buckingham. He suggested that improved reimbursement collection could fund additional inspection and enforcement resources and called for greater transparency regarding inspections, violations, and corrective actions. Third, Mr. Emerine reported that he had received written confirmation from PARTF (Parks and Recreation Trust Fund) that the town's grant application had never been submitted. He called for improved transparency in the park planning process and asked the Council to reconsider its decision not to conduct a detailed town-wide survey, noting that an informal poll on the Stewards of Weddington Facebook page showed 51 respondents in support of a detailed survey versus only 4 opposed. He provided document packets for each Council member and the Town Administrator.

Cathy Brown, a resident of Long View Court, raised concerns about the tone and conduct of the previous month's meeting. She stated that multiple residents who attended or viewed the July meeting felt that the Mayor's opening remarks were intended to discourage public records requests by characterizing them as a financial burden to the town. Ms. Brown maintained that the responsibility for public records costs lies with the Council's lack of transparency, not with residents exercising their legal right to request records. She also noted that she had not received the records she requested. She made additional comments regarding a pending land use matter involving a proposed mosque at the intersection of 12 Mile and Newtown Roads, suggesting the Council consider pausing the park project pending resolution of that matter. She concluded by remarking that decorum and professional conduct are expected of all seated at the Council table.

Bill Deter, a 20-year resident of Waybridge, offered positive remarks directed at the Parks and Events Committee. He commended the committee for the quality of the Camp New Providence event held the previous weekend, describing it as an educational and engaging experience, and encouraged greater resident participation in future events.

8. Representative David Willis

State Representative David Willis appeared before the Council to provide an update and respond to questions.

1. Update on the State's Budget

Representative Willis reported that the North Carolina General Assembly had just concluded its short session, during which the full biennial budget was finalized — approximately one year behind schedule. He described the budget as historic in terms of its investments across the state, highlighting significant funding for K-12 education, law enforcement, and specialized programs including robotics, STEM, and speech and debate. Representative Willis noted that he chairs the House K-12 Education Committee and described several initiatives he considers beneficial to students and families across the state, including those in Union County.

2. Discussion on new State legislation

The Mayor raised House Bill 1047, a regulatory reform bill that includes a 90-day "shot clock" provision under which development applications not acted upon within 90 days would be automatically approved. The Mayor noted that the provision as structured would primarily affect municipalities with populations over 20,000, and asked Representative Willis for an update on its status and potential impact.

Representative Willis stated that HB 1047 is a lengthy, multi-topic bill and expressed the need for careful scrutiny of all its provisions. He described a broader pattern of state-level legislation that, while well-intentioned, can impose mandates on local governments that conflict with the needs of well-functioning communities such as those in Union County. He noted that he and Representative Arp, along with Senator Johnson, have consistently pushed back on what they described as overly prescriptive state mandates related to development, zoning, and property rights. Representative Willis emphasized that Union County communities manage these matters effectively and generally do not require state-level intervention. He noted that the preferred approach is to make compliance with such mandates opt-in rather than mandatory, and to use population thresholds or other mechanisms to protect smaller municipalities. He referenced a previously successful effort to prevent harmful development-related language from being enacted, as well as an ongoing local bill effort to exempt Union County from a downzoning provision enacted in a prior session.

Councilmember McLaughlin asked Representative Willis what the Council could do to support his advocacy efforts in Raleigh, and what the Council should expect from him when a state-level response is needed. Representative Willis emphasized the importance of proactive, two-way communication — asking to be informed early of emerging local concerns rather than learning of them after the fact. He noted that he is available via phone, text, or email, and expressed a commitment to attending local meetings when possible. He acknowledged the challenge posed by late-breaking legislative changes and stated that, under the new House Speaker, there has been improvement in the amount of time members are given to review legislation before a vote.

The Mayor thanked Representative Willis for his ongoing support of the town, including his role — along with Senator Johnson — in securing an additional \$100,000 appropriation for the town park, and for collaborative work on a cell tower safety issue affecting local schools.

9. Public Safety Report – Deputy Plyler

Deputy David Plyler presented the monthly public safety report for July 2026. The report included the following activity: over 700 preventive patrols, over 80 business checks, and just under 90 traffic stops. Deputy Plyler also noted a number of security checks conducted during the month and used the opportunity to remind residents that free security check requests are available through the Town of Weddington website, the Union County Sheriff's Office website, or by contacting his office directly. He encouraged residents who will be away from their homes to submit requests so that deputies may periodically check their properties.

The Mayor offered personal remarks following his participation in a recent ride-along with Weddington and Union County deputies, commending the deputies for their professionalism, composure, and the breadth of situations they are called upon to manage.

10. Consent Agenda

A. Approve July 13, 2026 Town Council Regular Meeting Minutes

A motion to approve the July 13, 2026 Town Council Regular Meeting Minutes was made by Councilmember Ladner and seconded by Councilmember McLaughlin. The motion carried unanimously.

11. Public Hearing

A. Public Hearing – To receive and consider comments in reference to CZ-2026-03 Application by Signature Properties of the Carolinas LLC Requesting Conditional Zoning Approval for the Development of a 37-Lot Conventional Subdivision Located at the Intersection of Providence Road and Rea Road.

The Mayor opened the public hearing.

Staff Presentation: Interim Planner Lela Ijames of Centralina provided a staff overview of the application. She reported that the subject property is a 78-acre, currently vacant and wooded parcel located at the prominent intersection of Providence Road and Rea Road, in the Residential Conservation District (RCD). The proposal from Signature Properties of the Carolinas, LLC is for a 37-lot conventional subdivision, with lots ranging from 1 to 1.5 acres. The development, named Grandview, would dedicate approximately 32.5% of the parcel to open space — exceeding the UDO's 20% minimum — and would feature a gated internal roadway, sidewalks on both sides of the street, preserved stream buffers, and significant tree-save areas. Ms. Ijames confirmed that NCDOT found no requirement for a Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA), and that NCDOT approved an emergency-only secondary access connection onto Rea Road in lieu of a full second entrance. The proposal meets or exceeds all applicable UDO development standards. The Planning Board recommended approval following two meetings. Staff likewise recommended approval, finding the project consistent with the town's Future Land Use Plan and compatible with surrounding residential development patterns.

Applicant Presentation: Mel Graham, developer with Signature Properties of the Carolinas, LLC, presented visual materials illustrating the proposed Grandview development. He described the project as a high-quality, low-density subdivision in keeping with the character established by comparable developments he has undertaken in the area. Key design features include a heavily landscaped and gated entry off Providence Road, a central green space with a gazebo, a naturalized walking trail system connecting throughout the development, and perimeter fencing along Providence and Rea Roads. Lot sizes and home construction standards were described as consistent with the high-end custom market. Mr. Graham emphasized that the project involves minimal tree disturbance, as only areas needed for roads and the required stormwater retention are to be graded, leaving the substantial wooded open space areas undisturbed.

Public Comments:

Clayton Jones addressed the tree survey included in the application, noting that within the area designated for disturbance, 93 heritage trees were identified, of which only 12 are proposed to be preserved. He expressed concern that this ratio was insufficient and contrasted it with the level of scrutiny applied to a prior development

regarding a much smaller number of heritage trees. He questioned whether the application should proceed without greater effort to preserve more of the heritage trees in the disturbed area.

Chad Emerine stated that while the application is generally consistent with the town's land use plan, he believed it contained missing information and items potentially inconsistent with the UDO, and requested that the Council table the application pending resolution of outstanding questions. His specific concerns included: (1) the NCDOT letter in the packet does not definitively state that a permanent second entrance on Rea Road cannot be approved, while the UDO requires two points of ingress and egress; (2) two intermittent streams within the development appear to have only 30-foot buffers, where Section 58-520 of the UDO requires 50-foot buffers for drainage easements serving properties over 75 acres; (3) the tree inventory was based on a sample study rather than a complete inventory as required by the UDO; (4) no conditional approval letter for sewer service was included in the packet, and no sewer modeling had been completed; (5) a letter confirming the easement over the Hudson property has not been provided; and (6) several required items — including utility easements, a lighting plan, building envelopes, and corrected development agreement setbacks — are absent from the application.

The public hearing was thereafter closed.

12. Discussion/Action Items

A. Discussion and possible consideration of CZ-2026-03 Application by Signature Properties of the Carolinas LLC Requesting Conditional Zoning Approval for the Development of a 37-Lot Conventional Subdivision Located at the Intersection of Providence Road and Rea Road.

The Council engaged in substantive discussion regarding the application following the public hearing.

Councilmember McLaughlin expressed overall support for the project's low density and design quality but raised several questions. She noted concern about the absence of a Traffic Impact Analysis given the volume of activity at the Providence Road and Rea Road intersection, characterizing it as the busiest intersection in town. Mr. Graham and engineer Brent Cowan of the Isaacs Group clarified that NCDOT confirmed no TIA was required, as the project generates an estimated 336 daily vehicle trips — below the 500-trip daily and 50-trip peak-hour thresholds — and that turning movements into the development had been reviewed and approved in coordination with NCDOT engineers. Councilmember McLaughlin also sought clarification about the secondary emergency access point, questioning whether it would be available to residents in the event of a blockage at the primary entrance. Mr. Graham confirmed that the emergency access connects to an existing NCDOT curb cut on Rea Road and would be paved to the right-of-way, with the remainder in gravel. While the access is designated for emergency use, he confirmed that residents could use it in the event of an extended incident blocking the primary entrance.

Councilmember McLaughlin further pressed on the heritage tree preservation question raised during the public hearing, noting that only 12 of 93 heritage trees in the disturbed area would be saved, and asking whether a higher preservation standard could be required. Mr. Graham and engineer Cowan responded that the 93 trees in the disturbed area represent only a portion of total heritage trees on the site; an additional 676 or more heritage trees are located in the undisturbed open space areas and will be preserved. Mr. Graham stated that the trees identified for removal in the disturbed area are primarily scrub trees that grew up in former farmland, and that the development's large lot sizes and custom-build approach provide significant opportunity for individual lot-level tree preservation by builders and homeowners. He also noted that street trees would be planted throughout to create long-term canopy.

Councilmember Ladner stated that while she would personally prefer the property to remain undeveloped, she could find no material fault with the application given its compliance with UDO standards, its low density, and its overall design quality. The Mayor concurred, noting that the project had been reviewed by multiple planners and the Planning Board, that the open space provided exceeds the UDO requirement by 12 percentage points, and that the emergency access arrangement is consistent with approaches used in other Weddington developments.

The town's attorney clarified for the Council that a conditional zoning approval at this stage grants the applicant the right to develop a 37-lot subdivision in material conformance with the plans presented, subject to all

applicable UDO, state, and federal standards. The attorney noted that the applicant would be required to return to the Council for approval of any material changes, and that all stormwater, erosion control, building code, and utility requirements remain fully applicable and enforceable.

B. Discussion and possible adoption of Ordinance CZ-2026-03

No separate discussion was recorded for this sub-item beyond the broader deliberation under Item 12.A.

C. Statement of Reasonableness and Consistency

No separate discussion was recorded for this sub-item.

13. New Business

A. Appointment of the new Town Administrator and Clerk, Doug Gailey

The formal appointment and swearing-in of Doug Gailey as Town Administrator and Clerk was noted. Council members and staff offered welcoming remarks, and State Representative Willis also acknowledged Mr. Gailey's appointment. Council members expressed optimism that his presence would help stabilize town operations and reduce organizational stress on existing staff.

B. Discussion and possible approval for engaging an appraiser for Town property.

The Council discussed the matter of engaging a real property appraiser for town-owned property. The town attorney clarified the scope of the approval being sought and noted that the Council could place a cost cap on the engagement, with any amount exceeding that cap requiring return to the Council for further approval. The Council expressed general support and agreed that a specific cost cap of \$3,500 should be established, with the understanding that costs beyond that threshold would require Council authorization before proceeding.

C. Direction to Town Administrator

The Council provided direction to Town Administrator Gailey on two matters.

First, the Council directed the Town Administrator to begin the process of identifying and vetting candidates for a part-time planning position to relieve pressure on existing staff. The Mayor noted that, given the town's current staffing situation and active development pipeline, this position is an immediate need. It was further noted that the individual hired into this role may also provide support on code enforcement matters, which have been a recurring concern. The Council asked the Town Administrator to provide input on candidate qualifications and to notify the Council when individuals are ready to be interviewed.

Second, Councilmember McLaughlin raised the issue of Council members' access to technology adequate for reviewing planning documents. She noted that current iPads are insufficient for rendering large plan sets, and that the lack of access to platforms such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom has impaired the Council's ability to conduct remote interviews and access materials. The Council expressed unanimous support for pursuing updated devices, noting that funds may already be allocated in the budget. Town Administrator Gailey agreed to research available options and associated costs and report back to the Council.

Additionally, the Mayor informed the Council that a safety hazard had been recently identified on the proposed park property in the form of an uncovered well. He requested authorization to take immediate, low-cost steps to secure the site pending a formal determination of what remediation the county would require for proper closure. The Council concurred that appropriate interim safety measures should be taken without delay.

14. Reports

A. Update from Park and Events Committee

Parks and Events Committee Chair Gayle Butler reported on the Camp New Providence event held July 31 and August 1, 2026. The two-day event drew hundreds of attendees and was described as a significant success. The event featured living history presentations, period military demonstrations, historical speakers — including the author of Cornwallis in Charlotte — and a connection to the Museum of the Waxhaws. Ms. Butler noted that the

event received front-page coverage in the Enquirer Journal, and that Congressman Mark Harris attended and offered to assist in identifying federal grants to support future commemoration of the Camp New Providence site. The committee indicated it is now turning its planning focus to an expanded Christmas event. Ms. Butler expressed gratitude to participating presenters, town staff, and committee members for their efforts. The Mayor and Council members extended commendations to the committee for the quality of the inaugural event.

B. Transportation Report

The Mayor noted there was nothing significant to report on transportation matters and indicated he would provide updates on the I-77 South project as they become available.

C. Update from Finance Officer

The Finance Officer reported that, as the first month of the new fiscal year, financial operations are in good standing. She noted that the Tax Collector has already received the tax scroll from the county and converted it to the town's system in record time, with the result that tax bills will be issued earlier than in prior years, though the due date remains unchanged. Regarding the annual audit, the Finance Officer reported that draft financial statements are in hand and are expected to be submitted to the Local Government Commission (LGC) by the end of the current week. She noted that a previously filed appeal to the LGC has received no response, which she interpreted as a positive indication.

D. Update from Tax Collector

No separate discussion was recorded beyond the Finance Officer's remarks above.

E. Update from Town Planner

No update was presented, as the town is currently operating with interim planning assistance through Centralina.

F. Update from Town Administrator and Clerk

Town Administrator Doug Gailey noted that he had sent an update email to Council members on the prior Friday and stated his intention to continue weekly Friday communications to keep the Council informed between meetings. He acknowledged that he is still in the early stages of familiarizing himself with town operations and anticipated having more substantive updates in future meetings.

G. Council Comments

Councilmember Ladner expressed gratitude for the appointment of Town Administrator Gailey and acknowledged the significant contributions of long-serving staff members — specifically Finance Officer Leslie, Tax Collector Kim, and Administrative Assistant Debbie — for sustaining town operations through a period of organizational challenge.

Councilmember McLaughlin echoed appreciation for staff's sustained effort under difficult circumstances and expressed enthusiasm for the positive direction she anticipated under the new Town Administrator's leadership.

Councilmember Soukup thanked Administrative Assistant Debbie for preparing Council materials and for assistance with onboarding, including help with the Council's iPad setup.

The Mayor thanked all staff and indicated that, with the Town Administrator now in place and a planner and permit technician anticipated to follow, he expected the town's operational environment to normalize in the near term.

15. Closed Session Pursuant to NCGS 143.318.11(a)(3)

A. To consult with an attorney employed or retained by the public body in order to preserve the attorney-client privilege between the attorney and the public body.

A motion to enter closed session pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11(a)(3) was made by Councilmember Ladner and seconded by Councilmember Soukup. The motion carried unanimously.

The Council recessed for approximately five minutes prior to entering closed session.

16. Adjournment

The meeting record does not reflect a formal adjournment motion following the closed session.