

February 24, 2025

At 6:00 PM Mayor McNinch called the Working Session of the Denton Town Council to order on this date, leading everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Attendance:

Council members in attendance included: Mayor McNinch, Dallas Lister, Keith Johnson Lester Branson and Frank Taylor.

Staff in attendance included: Scott Getchell, George Bacorn, Mark Chandler, Donna Todd, Katie Northam, and Emily Spencer.

Legal Counsel in attendance was Curtis Booth.

Discussion was held on the following items:

His Hope Ministries

Councilman Johnson recused himself from this discussion due to conflict of interest because his wife is on the His Hope Ministries board and left the meeting room while this item was being discussed. Stephanie Johnson and Andrew Breeding gave an overview of the current projects and grants that His Hope Ministries are working on. They also shared different programs that they have implemented and ones that they would like to implement in the near future. Mrs. Johnson expressed the agency's gratitude for the current support of the Town.

Mr. Breeding shared the impact that the shelter has on the community when it must close for the summer and the need for a year-round shelter. He proposed a development project and is requesting a land acquisition from Town property on Market Street. His Hope is requesting about 2 acres of land on which they would build a 1400 square foot home, parking lot, an outdoor area, and stormwater management. Possibly in the future, they could expand for placement of tiny homes. When asked about a timeframe, they indicated that with all funding sources they have been in contact with, they have been told that they first need to acquire land before they can apply for the grants, so they are not really on any time restriction.

The Council members had several questions and concerns about donating the land. Councilman Lister indicated that other Community Agencies and Commercial Agencies have also inquired about the property on Market Street. He stated that there is a community want for more Recreational space, but since the Town currently has money tied up in other park projects, he is not sure that the Town can financially take on another "park and recreational" project at this time. He does think that this is something that should be discussed with the public for opinion.

Mayor McNinch agreed that another Community Interest meeting should be held about the property and that the Town needs to look into how much longer we are required to keep the property in our name.

Commerce Drive

The Council reviewed and discussed letters, emails and phone conversations from those involved in the properties in connection with Commerce Drive. There is some misinterpretation of what the JPA response is saying.

Councilman Lister understands the response to say that JPA will put in two million dollars to build their part of Commerce Drive but wants to manage the road build and does not want any other landowners to be able to do anything with the "crescent moon" shaped part gifted to the Town. He would like to know if there are any other alternatives.

Councilman Johnson stated that if Commerce Drive does not come, Legion Road cannot accommodate the amount of traffic that JPA is proposing.

2025-5

Council members all agree that the Town's position is to make the best decision for the community and want to see all the landowners work together in the fairest way.

Councilman Lister believes we should get clarification from JPA to see if Council is interpreting the letter correctly and they are stating that they will build their portion of the roadway and if so, touch base with the other landowners and see if they are in agreement to split the remaining portion to get the road built.

Councilman Taylor agreed and wanted to add that he thinks we should counter with JPA that the "crescent moon" will be owned by the Town, and we would make the decision on what to do with that piece.

Water & Sewer Rates

Councilman Lister gave an overview of the Utility Commission's discussion and recommendation on Water and Sewer Rates. The recommendation is to move to an annual automatic rate increase. This would be at a small percentage rather than waiting several years and making a large increase at once like we are currently doing now. They are also recommending setting a policy in place to maintain a six-month reserve. Currently we have over six months in our reserve, but within the next year we will go under if we do not do an increase.

Councilman Branson stated his concerns for an annual increase stating that people get so upset when we do rate changes every few years and worries this will upset them more.

Councilman Lister stated that he thinks it will be better because it will be a small increase yearly rather than residents having a big increase all at once which can cause a hardship.

Mark Chandler stated that unfortunately everything is going up in price and we cannot maintain our current rates. Chemicals, Electric, and Disposal fees are the three biggest costs, and he does not see any of those going down in price.

Mr. Getchell was able to explain how the Waterworth program works and how they are able to do more real-time projections with that program.

Councilman Lister stated that keeping a six-month reserve is important in case something major happens to a pump or well that can be extremely expensive, then the Town is not shut down completely like he has seen happen in other Towns. He would like to recommend putting an Ordinance in place for the six-month reserve.

Executive Session

With no further business to discuss for the February 24, 2025 Working Session, Mayor McNinch asked for consideration to hold an Executive Session for the discussion of Legal Matters – by Authority of Open Meetings Act, Maryland Code Annotated, General Provisions Article § 3-305 (b) (2014) (3) consider the acquisition of real property for a public purpose and matters directly related thereto; (7) consult with counsel to obtain legal advice.

At 7:09 PM, Councilman Lister made a motion to hold an Executive Session as requested, seconded by Councilman Johnson, passing unanimously.

The Executive Session was held in the Training Room on the 2nd Floor of the Town Office Building.

Present

Council members in attendance included: Mayor McNinch, Dallas Lister, Keith Johnson Lester Branson and Frank Taylor.

Staff in attendance included: Scott Getchell, George Bacorn, Mark Chandler, Donna Todd, Katie Northam, and Emily Spencer.

Legal Counsel in attendance was Curtis Booth.

Discussion

Discussion was held with the Town Attorney on the development of the proposed Commerce Drive Project.

2025-6

Staff and the Town Attorney will work with property owners and State Highway to continue to move the project forward.

No action was taken during the Executive Session

At 7:27 PM, Councilman Lister made a motion to close the Executive Session and reopen the Working Session. The motion was seconded by Councilman Johnson, passing unanimously.

The Executive Session was closed, and the meeting room was reopened to the public.

Working Session Resumed

With no further business to discuss, Mayor McNinch asked for a motion to close the Working Session.

At 7:27 PM Councilman Taylor made a motion to close the Working Session, seconded by Councilman Branson, passing unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

*Emily Spencer,
Deputy Clerk-Treasurer*