

**MINUTES OF THE TOWN OF FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL  
REGULAR MEETING  
FEBRUARY 9, 2026**

**THE FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL** held a regular meeting on Monday, February 9, 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, Council Members: Joe Collins, Travis Higdon, Rita Salain, Robbie Tompa, and Jeff Berry.

Mayor Guffey noted that February 10th marks the Town of Franklin's 171st anniversary since its incorporation.

Mayor Guffey recognized Tourism Development Authority (TDA) members in attendance and congratulated Town Manager Amie Owens for receiving the Duke Energy Citizenship Award at a recent chamber of commerce banquet. He also thanked those who assisted during the Town's recent cybersecurity issues, including the North Carolina Joint Cybersecurity Task Force, Macon County IT Department, and specifically Justin Setser, who serves multiple roles including IT Director, Planning Director, and now interim Fire Chief. Justin was presented with a card and gift in recognition of his extraordinary service during the crisis.

**2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

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

**3. ADOPTION OF THE FEBRUARY 9, 2026 TOWN COUNCIL AGENDA**

***Council Member Rita Salain made a motion, seconded by Vice Mayor Mike Lewis to approve the Town Council Agenda for February 9, 2026 as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.***

**4. APPROVAL OF THE CONSENT AGENDA FOR FEBRUARY 9, 2026**

- A.) Approval of the January 5, 2026 Regular Town Council Meeting Minutes
- B.) Budget Amendments
- C.) Request Rights to Advertise Delinquent Taxes for 2025

***Vice Mayor Mike Lewis made a motion, seconded by Council Member Robbie Tompa to approve the consent agenda for February 9, 2026 meeting as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.***

**5. PRESENTATION**

- A.) Marketing Update for Tourism Development Authority – Morgan Stewart and Devon Dupuis, Stewart Communications and TDA Chair Tim Crabtree

Tim Crabtree, Chair of the Tourism Development Authority, introduced Morgan Stewart and Devon Dupuis from Stewart Communications, who have been handling marketing for Franklin's TDA for over a year. Morgan Stewart presented a comprehensive overview of their marketing efforts for the Town. He explained that extensive research was conducted to understand who visits Franklin, why they come, and how to effectively market to them. The research showed visitors primarily come for the mountains,

waterfalls, hiking experiences, and Franklin's authentic character. About 50% of visitors are from Florida, with the rest coming from throughout the Southeast.

Stewart detailed their marketing strategy, which included:

- Creating relationships with stakeholders (retailers, restaurants, hotels) through meetings and gathering input
- Conducting visitor surveys during events like July 4th celebrations
- Building partnerships with regional tourism organizations like Visit Smokies
- Responding proactively to Hurricane Helene's impact by producing videos showing open businesses
- Developing comprehensive digital marketing through website, social media, and visual assets

Marketing results were impressive, with 5.69 million people reached through Facebook, 15,000 monthly website visits, and two billboards generating 4.8 million views annually. Stewart noted that for a budget of approximately \$45,000, they've reached about 10% of the Super Bowl viewership at a fraction of the cost.

Mr. Stewart highlighted that occupancy tax collection was the second highest year on record, with 25% year-over-year increases in both August and November. He also outlined 2026 goals including creating a print visitor guide, doubling Facebook followers and email subscribers, emphasizing Franklin's affordability and authenticity, and enhancing the website to allow visitors to curate their experiences.

During Town Council discussion, relationships with the TDC (Tourism Development Commission) were discussed, with Councilwoman Salain asking about coordination between the organizations. TDA Chair Tim Crabtree mentioned they were also working on beautification projects and events using the portion of their funding designated for infrastructure improvements. Mayor Guffey emphasized that environmental preservation and conservation are economic issues in a tourism-dependent area like Franklin, and Mr. Stewart added that the recent decision to return the Noquisiyi Mound to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians has generated positive national media coverage.

## **6. PUBLIC SESSION**

Non signed up for public comment.

## **7. ITEMS FROM COUNCIL**

Council Member Robbie Tompa recognized the work of the TDA and noted the improving relationships between TDA, TDC, and the Chamber. He mentioned attending a recent meeting of the Franklin Downtown Merchants Association and commended their efforts to improve the downtown area.

Council Member Rita Salain expressed gratitude for the \$4 million grant received for the Clearwell project at the Water Treatment Plant. She also requested removal of the newspaper/publication box structure at the end of Main Street, noting that most boxes are empty and the structure collects trash. She stated she spoke with Janet Greene, building owner, and the box structure does not belong to her.

Town Attorney John Henning Jr. explained the structure was created to centralize newspaper and publication distribution rather than having boxes scattered throughout downtown, but acknowledged it may no longer be serving its intended purpose.

## 8. PUBLIC HEARING

- A.) Public Hearing beginning at 6:05 p.m. or as closely thereafter to receive public input on a proposed lease of Town-owned property located at 95 E. Main Street for the purpose of an outdoor dining area – Amie Owens, Town Manager

**Mayor Guffey opened the Public Hearing at 6:37 p.m.**

Town Manager Amie Owens explained that JR Chop House (formerly Root and Barrel Kitchen) was seeking to lease a 15' x 40' portion of town-owned property for outdoor dining. The lease would mirror a previous agreement, including a \$300 annual escalator. The business owners were not present but were supportive of proceeding with the presentation as discussed.

No members of the public signed up to speak on this item.

**Mayor Guffey closed the Public Hearing at 6:39 p.m.**

***Vice Mayor Mike Lewis made a motion, seconded by Council Member Robbie Tompa to approve the lease of Town-owned property located at 95 E. Main Street for the purpose of outdoor dining, as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.***

## 9. NEW BUSINESS

- A.) Request formal approval of Town Council to waive all late fees for January and February 2026 utility billing due to system failure – Sarah Bishop, Finance Director

Finance Director Sarah Bishop explained that the Town experienced a system outage from January 14 through early February, which affected residents' ability to pay their utility bills. She requested Town Council formally approve waiving late fees for January and February 2026 bills due to this situation, noting that the system is now restored and March billing should proceed normally.

***Council Member Joe Collins made a motion, seconded by Vice Mayor Mike Lewis to approve the waving all late fees for January and February 2026 utility billing, as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.***

- B.) Requested approval of Street Closures – Amie Owens, Town Manager

1. Use of the Town Hall Parking Lot for the Macon County Farmers Market from May 1 through November 30 from 7:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. - excluding days when there are town events scheduled in the same area
2. Iotla Street on the 2nd and 4th Saturdays from 4:00 p.m. until 9:00 p.m. of each month May through October 10 to hold Pickin' on the Square
3. Iotla Street on Friday, May 15 from 11:30 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. for Law Enforcement Memorial Day Observance
4. Iotla Street on Friday, September 11 from 8:30 am until 9:00 a.m. for 9/11 Remembrance

5. Iotla Street on Thursday, September 17 from 5:30 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. for Constitution Day Celebration
6. Iotla Street on Tuesday, October 13 from 11:30 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. for Fire Fighters Memorial Observation

***Vice Mayor Mike Lewis made a motion, seconded by Council Member Joe Collins to approve all the Street Closures, as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.***

## **10. DEPARTMENTAL UPDATES**

- A.) Public Works – Bill Deal, Public Works Director reported on several department activities:
- Snow removal efforts during the recent storm, noting their primary goal is ensuring access for law enforcement and emergency services
  - No major water main breaks occurred during the recent cold weather, with most issues being residential freezing problems
  - The water distribution main project on Siler Road and Berry Boulevard is approximately 70% complete but delayed by weather
  - Capital improvements completed include a new skid system at Upper Brookwood pump station installed January 21
  - A generator and transfer switch at Prentiss Bridge have been installed and are awaiting natural gas hookup
  - Plans for replacement of three outdated fire hydrants on Town Mountain
  - Completed CCTV inspection of East Main Street sewer, with final report forthcoming
  - Collection of information for the local water supply plan due April 1
- B.) Wastewater Treatment Plant – Jason Hopkins, Wastewater Treatment Plant Supervisor/ORC reported it had been a quiet winter at the Wastewater Treatment Plant, noting that winter is typically the most challenging time to operate the facility as cold temperatures affect biological processes. He thanked Public Works for their efforts during snow removal.
- C.) Water Treatment Plant – Kyle Pocquette, Water Treatment Plant Supervisor/ORC reported that:
- Unusually high-water usage for this time of year, reaching 1.8 million gallons per day (in a 2-million-gallon capacity plant), attributed to people dripping faucets during cold weather
  - Bathroom remodeling projects underway at the plant
  - Installation of a new PLC on the air burst system for intake screens
  - Construction has begun on the high service pump station, with the site cut to grade and waiting for retaining wall construction before concrete work begins
  - Only one weather related backflow incident, which was on the customer side
- D.) Streets – Chris Waldroop, Streets Supervisor thanked both his streets team and public works personnel who assisted with snow removal during the recent storm. He reported:
- Construction on the Sunnyside Park bathroom project started mid-January but was delayed by weather
  - Winter snowflake decorations will be removed from poles by the end of February, to be replaced with spring/summer banners in late March or early April
  - Continuing to work with vendors on the roundabout planting project to source appropriate plants
  - Planning to add a new employee in the coming weeks

Mayor Guffey asked about an opening date for Sunnyside Park. Amie Owens explained they're trying to coordinate the pour-in-place surface installation with the playground completion, noting temperature requirements and curing time for the surface. Despite caution fencing, people are already trying to use the playground before it's ready for public use.

**11. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- A.) Next Town Council Meeting is Monday, March 2, 2026
- B.) Rescheduled Special Called Meeting - Town Council Retreat – Friday, February 20 and Saturday, February 21, 2026 at Fontana Village Resort – special called meeting notice will be posted

**12. ADJOURNMENT**

***Council Member Joe Collins made a motion, seconded by Vice Mayor Mike Lewis to adjourn the meeting at 7:00 p.m. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6-0.***

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Stacy J. Guffey, Mayor

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Nicole Bradley, Town Clerk