

**MINUTES OF THE TOWN OF FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 5, 2026**

THE FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL held a regular meeting on Monday, January 5, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. in the Town Hall Board Room located at 95 East Main Street Franklin, NC.

1. CALL TO ORDER AND MOMENT OF SILENCE

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.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

3. ADOPTION OF THE JANUARY 5, 2026 TOWN COUNCIL AGENDA

Vice Mayor Lewis requested a change to the agenda, suggesting that item 5 (Introductions) be moved to after item 7 (Items from Council) to accommodate scheduling needs.

Vice Mayor Mike Lewis made a motion, seconded by Council Member Travis Higdon to approve the Town Council Agenda for January 5, 2026 with the amendment to move item 5 after item 7. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.

4. APPROVAL OF THE CONSENT AGENDA FOR JANUARY 5, 2026

A.) Approval of the December 1, 2025 Regular Town Council Meeting Minutes

Vice Mayor Mike Lewis made a motion, seconded by Council Member Robbie Tompa to approve the consent agenda for January 5, 2026 meeting as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.

6. PUBLIC SESSION

- Bob McCollum/Anglina Jumper - Mr. McCollum introduced Angelina Jumper, Cultural Resources Supervisor for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, who spoke about the significance of the Nikwasi/Noquisiyi Mound. Ms. Jumper expressed gratitude to the Town for stewarding the mound and emphasized the importance of co-stewardship moving forward. She noted that the mound is one of the only Cherokee mounds accessible to the public, making it an ideal place for interpretation. She also thanked those who had protected the mound historically.
- Gregory Wane Phelps - Mr. Phelps identified himself as a civil rights advocate and provided public notice regarding constitutional requirements related to criminal charges. He asserted that North Carolina's practice of charging by information rather than indictment violates the Fifth Amendment. He requested that the Council direct public officials to act in accordance with the U.S. Constitution.
- Kenneth Elkins - Mr. Elkins, a member of the Macon County committee for the 250th anniversary of the United States, requested permission to install commemorative signs. He described plans to create three different signs and asked to place one in front of Town Hall, noting that he had already obtained

permission from the DOT for signs on Georgia Road and Otto. (Town Attorney Henning noted he will review policy to ensure Town's liability).

- Kim Leister - Ms. Leister, town resident, discussed the issue of trash collection. She noted that Franklin is the only Town in the area that does not provide trash and recycling pickup. She presented information on how nearby towns handle trash collection and emphasized benefits of municipal trash service, including improving neighborhood cleanliness, helping older residents, and encouraging recycling to extend the life of the Macon County landfill.
- Elizabeth Bolstad Ridler, Regional Director, Coalition Against Bigger Trucks (CABT)- Town Manager Amie Owens read a statement from Ms. Riddler, Regional Director of the Coalition Against Bigger Trucks. The statement outlined current bills being considered in Congress that would allow heavier commercial trucks on roads. The coalition requested that the town send letters to North Carolina's congressional delegation opposing these increases.

7. ITEMS FROM COUNCIL

- Mayor Guffey thanked Council Member Jeff Berry for consistently volunteering at Town events. He also provided updates on the potential historic district designation for downtown Franklin, which will be determined on February 12, 2026. Mayor Guffey explained that this designation would incentivize redevelopment by qualifying buildings for a 40% federal historic tax credit. He noted that this designation has been a factor in the Scott Griffin Hotel redevelopment project.
- Council Member Higdon expressed concerns about the crosswalk at Lazy Hiker, noting visibility issues, particularly after dark. He suggested adding lighting and possibly moving the crosswalk location, and Mayor Guffey indicated they would address this with NCDOT at an upcoming meeting.
- Council Member Salain brought up two issues: recycling bins for public events, which would be discussed at the upcoming planning session, and the need to replace trees in downtown Franklin.
- Council Member Tompa expressed excitement for the coming year, particularly regarding the TDA board's activities and potential housing initiatives for the community.

5. INTRODUCTION/RECOGNITION

- A.) Hunter Cornwell, Police Officer – introduction by Police Chief Devin Holland
- B.) Truitt Curry, Police Officer - introduction by Police Chief Devin Holland
- C.) Marcus McCarson, Police Officer - introduction by Police Chief Devin Holland

Council Member Joe Collins made a motion, seconded by Vice Mayor Mike Lewis to go ahead and discuss items 9E & 9F due to the out-of-town guest in attendance. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.

Request approval of Resolution Endorsing Transfer of Nikwasi Mound/Noquisiyi to the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians - Town Attorney John Henning, Jr., and Mayor Stacy Guffey

Mayor Stacy Guffey provided historical context about the Nikwasi/Noquisiyi Mound. Town Attorney John Henning Jr. explained the legal procedure for transferring the property. He noted that the Town conveyed the mound to the Nikwasi Initiative nonprofit in 2019, and now the Initiative seeks to transfer it to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI). He also noted that the property remains subject to restrictions ensuring preservation and public access, which will be maintained in the transfer.

Bob McCollum, Elaine Eisenbraun (Executive Director), and other representatives from the Nikwasi Initiative and the EBCI spoke in support of the transfer. Ms. Eisenbraun requested clarification on record that the Initiative would be relieved of encumbrances in the preservation agreement that would not be appropriate for the tribe, such as retaining nonprofit status.

After reading the full Resolution, Town Attorney Henning confirmed that the Resolution addresses the concerns about encumbrances.

Council Member Travis Higdon made a motion, seconded by Council Member Robbie Tompa to approve the Resolution endorsing the transfer of the Nikwasi/Noquisiyi Mound to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.

Request approval of Resolution for the Town Council for the Town of Franklin Celebrating Preservation of the Nikwasi/Noquisiyi Mound – Mayor Stacy Guffey

Council Member Rita Salain read the Resolution, which honored citizens who helped preserve the mound in 1946. Vice Mayor Lewis suggested adding language to annually recognize October 7 (the date of the original transfer) as a commemorative day and potentially involving local schools in naming and celebrating this day.

Vice Mayor Mike Lewis made a motion, seconded by Council Member Rita Salain to approve the Resolution Celebrating Preservation of the Nikwasi/Noquisiyi Mound, as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.

A brief recess was taken for a group photograph with tribal representatives. The meeting resumed at 7:08 p.m.

8. PRESENTATION

A.) Annual Audit Report

Lutchia Perkins (Senior Staff Accountant with Martin Starnes & Associates) presented the fiscal year 2025 audit report. She reported that the town received a clean, unmodified opinion with no findings or questioned costs.

- The general fund increased by about \$1.8 million (17%), primarily due to property taxes and intergovernmental revenues
- Available fund balance increased to approximately \$11.5 million
- The available fund balance as a percentage of general fund expenditures increased by 16%, representing roughly 25 months of expenditures
- Water and sewer operating income was approximately \$1,150,000
- The quick ratio was 13.4, well above the 1.0 threshold considered healthy

The Local Government Commission noted no concerns with the Town's financial position.

B.) Main Street Visioning Plan – Allison Smicht, NC Department of Commerce Rescheduled for February

C.) Final Feasibility Study for old Angel Medical Center Property – Sarah VanLear, Project Manager, Development Finance Initiative

Sarah VanLear, Project Manager with the Development Finance Initiative, presented findings on the redevelopment potential of the former Angel Medical Center site. Key findings included:

- The 13-acre site is partially demolished with roadways, retaining walls, and basement walls remaining
- Only about 5 acres are immediately developable due to steep slopes and topographical challenges
- Reuse of existing structures would be challenging and costly
- The site could potentially support 50 for-sale units or 125 rental units, plus 5,000 square feet of retail
- Significant site preparation costs (\$500,000-\$700,000) would create barriers for developers
- The resulting premium sale prices needed to make the project financially viable (\$350,000 for townhomes, \$550,000 for single-family homes) have not been proven in the Franklin market
- Public or private development each present different challenges and risks

The study concluded that while demand exists for housing and retail in Franklin, the combination of acquisition costs and site preparation would require price points not yet established in the local market.

9. NEW BUSINESS

- A.) Request approval of Resolution of the Town Council for the Town of Franklin Withdrawing Its Offer to Purchase the Former Angel Hospital Site-Town Attorney John Henning, Jr. and Mayor Stacy Guffey
Town Attorney John Henning Jr., read the Resolution, which detailed the Town's previous work exploring potential uses for the property, including the DFI study. The resolution noted that HCA representatives had not made the property available for due diligence inspections and had indicated the offered purchase price may no longer be acceptable.

Mayor Guffey expressed disappointment in how negotiations with HCA had proceeded, noting that after significant time and effort, they were told in a casual manner that HCA might not be willing to sell at the offered price. Despite the disappointment, the feasibility study indicated the project would likely not have been viable at the proposed purchase price.

There was additional discussion on why HCA did not allow access for further inspections and if the lower parcel was still going to be gifted to the Town. Town Attorney Henning reminded Town Council that large scale development of the property would fall under Conditional Zoning and would need to come to Town Council for approval.

Council Member Joe Collins made a motion, seconded by Vice Mayor Mike Lewis to approve the Resolution Withdrawing the Town's Offer to Purchase the Former Angel Medical Center Site, as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.

- B.) Request approval of amendment to personnel policy- Annual Performance Review- Human Resources Director, Nicole Bradley

Human Resources Director Nicole Bradley explained a proposed change to the personnel policy regarding annual performance reviews. The current policy required employees to be in their position for six months to be eligible for step increases, which penalized employees who received promotions. The amendment would allow employees who have been with the town for at least six months to receive

prorated step increases even if they changed positions, while maintaining the six-month requirement for new hires.

Council Member Rita Salain made a motion, seconded by Council Member Robbie Tompa to approve the amendment to the personnel policy- Annual Performance Review, as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.

C.) Request from adjacent property owner to lease Town property for outdoor dining area – Town Manager Amie Owens

Town Manager Amie Owens explained that a new owner, Scott Higdon, was requesting to lease the same 15' by 40' tract previously leased for outdoor dining next to the shop house. The proposed three-year lease would include a \$300 annual escalator. A public hearing would be required before approval.

Vice Mayor Mike Lewis made a motion, seconded by Council Member Robbie Tompa to call for Public Hearing on Monday, February 2, 2026 at 6:05 p.m. or as closely thereafter to gain input regarding the request to lease Town property for outdoor dining, as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6 – 0.

D.) Request approval of proposed 2026-2027 Budget Calendar – Town Manager, Amie Owens Town Manager

Amie Owens presented the proposed budget calendar, which outlined the schedule from January through June 1, 2026, when budget approval is anticipated.

Council Joe Collins made a motion, seconded by Vice Mayor Mike Lewis to adopt the 2026-2027 budget schedule, as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6-0.

10. DEPARTMENTAL UPDATES

A.) Sarah Bishop, Finance Director reported that:

- Sales and use tax revenue has begun to show a slight decrease over the past three months, though still higher than the previous year
- Investment earnings are also starting to trend downward
- The finance department is beginning budget preparation work
- She and Mayor Guffey met with Allison Smith from the NC Main Street and Rural Planning Center, who provided valuable insights for the town's Main Street program application in 2027

B.) Justin Setser, Town Planner/IT Director provided an annual review of planning activities in 2025:

- 58 zoning permits were issued
- 32 new residential structures were permitted, plus a 60-unit apartment complex and a 56-unit townhome complex
- Code enforcement issued 200 notices of violation and collected 284 illegal signs
- The downtown historic district application will be reviewed on February 12
- A public meeting for property owners in the downtown district is scheduled for January 21
- Upcoming projects include a bike-walk plan, updates to the hazard mitigation plan, and a new town website
- Two in-town planning board seats and one ETJ seat will expire in February

- Mr. Setser also presented data on sidewalk improvements since 2020, noting that 28 streets totaling nearly a mile have been upgraded from poor to good condition, and six streets totaling 8,396 feet have been upgraded from fair to good. He is also tracking vacant buildings, with 25 currently identified within city limits.

C.) Devin Holland, Police Chief reported that:

- The department is now fully staffed for the first time in five years
- The organization No Wrong Door donated a drug incinerator
- In 2025, the department collected approximately 230 pounds of pills and 30 opioid liquids/patches
- Recent enforcement operations included underage alcohol sales checks (5 of 14 retailers sold to underage buyers)
- Speed humps have arrived and will be installed in residential areas with speeding issues
- Officers have been conducting traffic enforcement on Main Street since December 8, resulting in 39 stops, 14 warnings, and 7 citations
- Longstanding issues in the East Franklin neighborhood have been resolved through combined efforts of police enforcement, code enforcement, and property ownership changes
- The department's 2025 statistics included 680 incident reports, 335 arrests, 639 citation charges, 810 warning ticket charges, 310 collision reports, 64 DWI arrests, and 12,270 calls for service

11. ANNOUNCEMENTS

- A.) Next Town Council Meeting is Monday, February 2, 2026
- B.) Joint Meeting with ABC Board and Town Council – Tuesday, January 13, 2026 at 8:00 a.m. at Town Hall – special called meeting notice will be posted
- C.) Essentials of Local Government Course – Asheville – January 15-16, 2026 – quorum of Town Council Attending – notice of attendance will be posted
- D.) Town Offices Closed for Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday – January 19, 2026 – in accordance with NC State Holiday Schedule
- E.) Town Council Retreat – Friday, January 23 and Saturday, January 24, 2026 at Fontana Village Resort – special called meeting notice will be posted

12. ADJOURNMENT

Vice Mayor Mike Lewis made a motion, seconded by Council Member Travis Higdon to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 p.m. The motion carried unanimously. Vote: 6-0.

Stacy J. Guffey, Mayor

Nicole Bradley, Town Clerk