

Town Council Meeting: 8 September 2025
Draft Minutes

Call to Order: Mayor Joe Whited opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. Council members Jean Goodine, Patrick O’Connell, Fred Catlin, and Brad Schneider were present. Town Clerk Barbara Batson was also present. Council member Drew Beard was absent.

Planning Commission members Caroline Anstey, Jeanne Kauffmann, and David Pennington were present. Planning Commission member Constance Bruce was absent.

Approval of Agenda: Mr. Catlin moved to approve the agenda as presented. Mr. Schneider seconded, and the motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Approval of Minutes: Mr. Catlin moved to approve the July 2025 Town Council minutes as presented. Mr. Schneider seconded, and the motion passed unanimously (5-0). Ms. Goodine moved to approve the June 2025 Town Council minutes as presented. Mr. O’Connell seconded, and the motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Mayor Whited stated that he would hold his comments and the rest of the Council agenda until after they proceeded with the joint Planning Commission session.

Joint Session with Planning Commission: Ms. Kauffmann opened the Planning Commission meeting.

Ms. Anstey **moved** to approve the agenda as presented. Mr. Pennington **seconded** the motion, which passed unanimously (3-0).

Ms. Kauffmann stated that the purpose of the joint meeting was a public hearing to amend the Town zoning and subdivision ordinances, which have been made available to the public. She opened the public hearing. There being no speakers, she closed the public hearing.

Mr. Pennington **moved** to adopt the ordinance to amend the subdivision and site plan ordinances for the Town of Washington, and to assign responsibility for administration of subdivision plats and site plans as amended. Ms. Anstey **seconded** the motion, which passed unanimously (3-0).

There being no further business, Ms. Anstey **moved** to adjourn the Planning Commission meeting. Mr. Pennington **seconded** the motion, which passed unanimously (3-0).

Mayor’s Report: Mayor Whited stated that it had been an eventful summer with the water system, but they were making good progress with work on the wellhouse, checking valves, and doing other updates to the water system.

Mr. Schneider reported that the generator was in and powered up at the pump house, with the propane tank filled and the electrician coming back soon to do his final check. Mr. Schneider noted that the only thing remaining was the variable frequency drive, which he had dropped off at their office for them to look at and report back on. He commented that it was a “neat-looking installation.” Mr. Schneider also mentioned that they were dealing with a leak in Town that would likely be resolved the following day.

Mayor Whited said because they haven’t been able to establish where the leak is, there would be a brief water outage in Town during that time, hopefully only for an hour or two, with service restored by evening.

Ms. Batson mentioned that the affected area is limited to Harris Hollow and Main Street between Key Fountain and Harris Hollow.

Mayor Whited commented that all the valve work they’ve been doing was paying off, as they are able to minimize the impacts.

Infrastructure Report: Mr. Schneider stated that they would be using a new contractor that had helped the Town over the summer with a couple of emergency cases—Moyer Brothers of Luray—which has good equipment and capabilities and is moving into serving small communities. He said their costs are very competitive, and they should be able to do neater and faster work, as well as being able to address both sewer and water systems. Mr. Schneider said once the corrosion system pump had arrived, he would coordinate installation with the contractor, then the corrosion control system would be added to the system for lead control.

Mayor’s Report: Mayor Whited said Gail Swift had resigned as treasurer late in the summer after she and her husband, Judd, moved out of Town. Mayor Whited stated that he hoped to thank them formally at the next meeting, noting Gail’s nearly eight years of service on Council and Judd’s service on the Board of Zoning Appeals.

Mayor Whited said the Town was entering its high-tourism and holiday-planning season, including preparations for the 20th Christmas in Little Washington. He stated that volunteers were still needed and thanked John Fox Sullivan, Caroline Anstey, Drew Mitchell, Deb Harris, and others who had stepped forward to help.

Mayor Whited noted that Ms. Batson would provide the Treasurer’s Report since Council currently had no treasurer.

Treasurer’s Report: Ms. Batson reported that the audit is happening on the September 18, and she would have a fiscal year final report for them at the October meeting. She noted that the Town has \$40,000 in interest earned, which is in the LGIP, with another \$30,000–\$40,000 likely to be put in the LGIP at the end the audit. She said this was possible through great stewardship of Town Council and staff, ensuring they use their money wisely.

Town Attorney's Report: Martin Crim reported that Mr. Crim said he had two items to report, beginning with Rose River Commons Phase 2. He stated that he and Seth Turner had a productive meeting with Black Kettle representatives about the upcoming special use permit, which would go to the Planning Commission on September 22 and to Council on October 13. He said the permit would extend planned unit development (PUD) zoning to the Phase 2 area, and the two of them had discussed landscaping, lighting, and related issues.

Mr. Crim reported stated that filling the Council vacancy now required two meetings per the Commonwealth of Virginia—including a public hearing with notice of all proposed names and access to each person's resume and required materials. Mr. Crim said Town Council could make an interim appointment seven or more days after that hearing, a process that applied only to council vacancies and not to ARBs, planning commissions, or other bodies. He said because the vacancy occurred so close to the fall election and the next year's term, State Code did not provide for a special election; he had notified the Circuit Court and copied the registrar.

Mayor Whited stated that Council members have all received a note from Ms. Batson about scheduling that special meeting so they can move forward quickly in October to fill that seat.

Ms. Goodine asked if the position had been advertised.

Mayor Whited said they would be handling it as part of the official agenda at this meeting and would call for individuals to submit their letters of interest.

Planning Commission Report: Zoning Administrator Steve Gyurisin reported that the next Planning Commission meeting would be September 22 and that three items were being prepared following passage of the ordinance, with a fourth item reduced through consolidation that he hoped to approve administratively. He said the theater rezoning would add about 20 or 21 feet to the rear of the building on land fronting Main Street, with no additional auditorium seats planned and the space intended to improve backstage functions. He stated that a special use permit for the Washington School Annex would convert the vacant commercial building to apartments and that another special use permit would address Rush River Commons. Mr. Gyurisin noted that the Commission would make recommendations to Town Council in October.

Architectural Review Board: There was no report, as the ARB had not met the previous month.

Old Business: There was none.

New Business – Public Hearing to Amend the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance: Mayor Whited opened the public hearing. He said Town Council has had an opportunity to review copies of the ordinance, which has also been available to the public.

Mayor Whited invited public comment.

Mr. John Fox Sullivan asked if Mayor Whited could provide a summary of this item's origin.

Mayor Whited explained that the Commonwealth has moved to shift the ability to manage zoning and building in the Town to make that an administrative process rather than a legislative one. He said that previously, the Planning Commission would meet to discuss these types of changes—which would consider it legislatively or make a recommendation to Council—and the change would now make that an administrative process.

Mayor Whited said that depending on how Council votes tonight, they would appoint an agent for the Town who will approve those matters. He said the agent could take recommendations from the Planning Commission or the Town, but they would exercise their authority to approve or disapprove requests and site plans and other administrative matters related to zoning.

Ms. Goodine asked how they would choose the person who fills this role, as they would seem to hold a lot of power.

Mayor Whited responded that Council needed to consider the appointment, and the closed session had been included partly to discuss who should serve in that role. He said they would decide whether to appoint someone already on Council staff or a member of one of their boards. Mayor Whited said he recommends that Mr. Gyurisin remain zoning administrator while the Town administrator serve as the agent and provide a second set of eyes on decisions and sign off on matters. He said he was open to Council's thoughts. Mayor Whited said Mr. Catlin had noted that Council could address the issue in open session after adopting the ordinance, although the closed session had also been included to discuss other personnel matters.

Mr. Schneider said the rest of the ordinance is what already exists, and this is the only change.

Mayor Whited confirmed this, stating that the update inserts an agent into the process and also imposes some stricter timelines.

Mr. Crim said the timelines are set out in the statute, and he did not repeat them in the ordinance because they might change next year. He commented that the timelines depend on whether it's the first review or subsequent review—getting progressively shorter as the item proceeds. He noted that it's also a bit more complicated than just a set number of days because they have to get state agency input, which extends those time periods. He said it was the same with the time periods for the expiration of the site plans and subdivision plans, also in statute.

Mayor Whited closed the public hearing.

Mr. Schneider **moved** to adopt the amendment to the Ordinance for Subdivisions and Site Plans for the Town of Washington, as presented. Mr. Catlin **seconded** the motion. Roll was called, and the motion passed by the following vote: Mayor Whited—yes; Ms. Goodine—yes; Mr. Schneider—yes; Mr. Catlin—yes; Mr. O'Connell—yes.

Mayor Whited asked for consideration of appointing an agent.

Mayor Whited **moved** to appoint the Town Administrator as the agent for the Town of Washington as discussed.

Ms. Goodine asked if this were agreeable to the Town Administrator.

Ms. Batson said that she would work closely with Mr. Gyurisin, and he would still be the one with the expertise on everything pertaining to site planning. She stated that they would still get comments from Town Council and the Planning Commission, and she would merely be a final review and sign off.

Mr. Catlin commented that the way the General Assembly has promulgated this law, they are seeking to do things as expeditiously as possible, better achieved by having one person than a body of people who have to deliberate and then come together, especially when there is a very short timeline. He added that a paid person would be much more responsible and reliable than having a volunteer serve in this capacity.

Mr. Catlin **seconded** the motion. Roll was called, and the motion passed by the following vote: Mayor Whited–yes; Ms. Goodine–yes; Mr. Schneider–yes; Mr. Catlin–yes; Mr. O’Connell–yes.

Mayor Whited **moved** that Council deem approved the items that were under consideration at the beginning of summer. The Council agreed to the motion by unanimous voice vote.

Vacancies

Mayor Whited reported that there was a vacancy on Council as well as one on the ARB, and the Town welcomes anyone to send a letter of interest to fill out the remainder of the treasurer's term. He said they would be serving through January of 2027 if appointed to the term by Council in October, and that person could run for the election next November.

Ms. Batson stated that they would need to submit a letter by September 26.

Mr. Catlin noted that this is an open seat for treasurer.

Mayor Whited clarified that they are also a member of Town Council.

Mayor Whited stated that there is also a vacancy on the ARB, and Mr. Dwight McNeill was present to introduce himself.

Mr. McNeill acknowledged his presence.

Mr. Schneider **moved** to appoint Dwight McNeill to the Architectural Review Board. Ms. Goodine **seconded** the motion. Roll was called, and the motion passed by the following vote: Mayor Whited–yes; Ms. Goodine–yes; Mr. Schneider–yes; Mr. Catlin–yes; Mr. O’Connell–yes.

Other Business

Board of Supervisors Request – Courthouse Campus: Mayor Whited said Council had received an August letter from the Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors requesting a joint meeting to discuss the future of the courthouse campus and a potential courthouse building. He stated that he appreciated the Board's interest in Council's views but believed a meeting was premature until the Board decided whether to build a courthouse, where it would be located, and how much it would cost. Mayor Whited said the Town would be glad to help finalize plans after the Board made its initial decision and that Council could then consider a future public joint meeting on how the project would proceed.

Ms. Goodine said she respectfully disagreed, and having seen the video from the Board of Supervisors, the people made a strong argument that in this small County and Town, governing bodies should be working together to solve problems as they arise. She said they also made the strong point that things can't wait. She said if the Council wants to be involved in decision-making, the time to at least talk with the Board of Supervisors is now, not further down the line.

Mayor Whited said his point was that they were not entirely certain what they were going to talk about until they've made a decision about whether they're going to build a courthouse. He said there is lots to talk about once they've made that decision, but he didn't entirely know what they would consider before that.

Mr. Schneider agreed and said until the County has decided what direction they want to go in, the Town doesn't need to be in the middle of that decision. He suggested that they decline the meeting offer until after that decision is made.

Ms. Goodine reiterated that the County would like the Town's input on how to go ahead on this, rather than staying back and waiting—so they could be involved in the early stages.

Mr. Catlin stated that he had comments and would read them accordingly:

"The first is that the Town of Washington is not wasting its meals and lodging tax on frivolous uses. The funds you use to operate the Town and to support the Town's infrastructure. Twenty years ago, the Town's septic systems were failing under the Town leadership.

"Mr. Sullivan was part of that leadership at that time and had the vision to look into the future, evolve and implement a wastewater infrastructure to ensure the Town's future well-being. One of the County supervisors carelessly called the care and maintenance of that nearly 20-year-old system as being done at a premium. I wish he was more careful and accurate with his words.

"The wastewater system has been run efficiently and effectively, but it is expensive to run, like all wastewater systems. The point is that the Town had no alternative then to implement the system. Bear the cost and run it efficiently.

"The Town also uses its tax revenue to secure the present and ensure the future of the community through careful and prudent planning. The second fact that seems to have been

overlooked throughout the County supervisors' discussions, which I was able to watch online, is that the Town's citizens are part of the County's revenue source. The impression that came out of the meeting last week was that the Town doesn't pay its fair share.

"But we pay County real estate taxes. And if you want to use the word premium, understand that because we're in an urban setting, each property owner in the Town is paying a premium in taxes because they hire a set value per acre in an urban environment. Next, let me share a sentiment.

"I applaud and appreciate Ms. Donahue's, Mr. Carney's, Ms. Smith's, and Ms. Conner's comments seeking to explore options for the Town Council and trying to find creative solutions. I especially appreciate that they come without preconditions so that we can have a fair and meaningful discussion. You don't have to make ultimatums or threats or preconditions to have good and productive agreements and relations.

"I grew up on a farm and learned early on that you work with your neighbors to mend boundary fences, share a hay baler, or collect stray cattle. These four supervisors are looking to find positive answers with their neighbors in much the same sentiment. It's disappointing, however, that one supervisor speaks of wanting to have open discussions, yet he sets preconditions and makes demands, threats, and ultimatums based on his version of the facts as he describes them.

"By the way, some of his assertions are questionable. For example, the Town did an informal yet rigorous study of the feasibility of cooperating with the County on wastewater systems and found that the systems differed significantly and there was little economy of scale in supplies or service. Moreover, the Town's system runs well, and I know this variable system has had troubles in the last few years.

"It therefore does not seem prudent for us to have the County manage the Town's wastewater system, as was inferred the other night. This is not the first time that the supervisor has entered into discussions with the Town and set high preconditions. Why do I call it preconditions?

"Because he spent 10 minutes the other night defining in detail and defending his arguments for their acceptance. That's more time than necessary for a discussion talking point. This smacks of political grandstanding, much like his ultimatum to freeze revenue transfers to the school system for the next three years.

"When there was a previous call for discussion on the BLA, the Boundary Line Adjustment, one of the preconditions he set, and indeed said was non-negotiable, was that there should be no affordable housing, even though this is a dire need for our local County residents. And there was an opportunity for additional affordable housing limits in Rush River, too. Many of the workers in our community who work or serve or teach here can't afford to live here, because

there isn't enough affordable housing, even though the County's comprehensive plan, as well as the Town's, as well as every municipality and state, calls for affordable housing.

“There are influential folks here in the community who see that as a threat, and they seem to have had this politician's ear. He now proposes as a precondition to these discussions that there should be a one-and-a-half to two-percent increase in the Town's meals and lodging tax, and that it should be given to the County for the next thirty years. That we instead alter some talking points, not preconditions, but ideas to be considered for joint County Board of Supervisors-Town Council discussions.

“If you raise the meals and lodging tax, do it by the same rate for the Town and the County. As they say, the rising tide lifts all boats. It spreads the cost increase to all tourists in the greater community and avoids potential legal threats.

“Two, explore the possible use of space in Rush River 2. One good suggestion floated in a recent issue of the newspaper from a citizen was to move the library to Rush River II, and a courthouse reconfigured into the current library building after its expansion. While there may be flaws in this proposal that make it unfeasible, I applaud the author's innovative thought process.

“Three, utilize the old church, the former Rack Theater, which is owned by the County and adjacent Courthouse Road, for part of the courthouse units. The building needs to be renovated anyway. The same can be done for a large portion of the old jailhouse, which also needs to be renovated.

“Four, the Town annually and purposefully sets aside funds each year for future capital expenses. It is an important discipline. While I understand the County has a multi-million dollar reserve that it could use to defray some of the costs of the courthouse, I don't believe that there is a similar possibility set aside for a portion of the County's revenues each year, again, a portion of which comes from Town citizens' taxes, into a future capital project fund.

“Perhaps the Town and the County could agree to set an annual goal for this purpose in their respective budgets. Five, support the development of more affordable housing in the County's six villages, as laid out in the County's comprehensive plan. It will provide a steady stream of revenue in the future from real estate taxes, and more importantly, house those who grew up here and want to stay and work here in the community, in a way that doesn't change the rural character of the County.

“And finally, hold regular meetings between members of the Town Council and the Board of Supervisors to discuss the long-term future and consequent needs of our conjoined communities. I too would be happy to bake a cake to bring to such sessions, because having those regularly scheduled meetings would be a way to ensure fellowship and cordial cooperation was nurtured between the two Governments. Let me end by saying that I respect

and appreciate the thought process of many of the County Supervisors as they grapple with the issue of the courthouse.

“In their deliberations last week, these members made it clear that they were trying to think outside the box, and in a way that best serves the overall community. They were thoughtful and open-minded. I look forward to working with them.

“We should avoid political grandstanding and instead work side by side to help address the shared challenges our community faces.”

Mayor Whited said Mr. Catlin’s comments on the water and sewer system reminded him that the Town had worked hard for nearly eight years to put its system on strong footing. He stated that the Town was in good shape with sound plans ahead, and when County officials raised combining the systems, he had said further discussion should wait until the County had its own system in order. Mayor Whited stated that the Town provided more water and sewer service at a fairer and lower rate than the County’s Sperryville system and said any future partnership should occur only when both systems were on equal footing. He said the Town was willing to advise the County or sewer board and stated that the Town administrator had helped the Washington Volunteer Fire Department secure a \$5,000 grant and pursue another grant that could bring the total to about \$30,000 for protective gear.

Mayor Whited stated that he had discussed possible tax arrangements with Mr. Crim, and there was no legally binding structure for the Town to commit future revenues to the County. He stated that relying on Town revenues would be insecure because future Councils could not be bound to a long-term payment structure, especially for 30 years. Mayor Whited said the County already received nearly \$300,000 a year from Town meals and lodging taxes, and additional tax transfer could leave Town-generated taxes covering nearly all courthouse debt.

He said a potential additional \$600,000 transfer would not amount to fair burden sharing and the Town still had its own infrastructure, safety, and tourism needs. Mayor Whited said although the Town was financially strong because of Council’s work, future downturns in meals and lodging revenue could require major property tax increases to support daily operations, including water and sewer. He said the Town wanted to work with the Board of Supervisors on the courthouse complex when the time was right, but the Board first needed to decide how to proceed because the Town could mainly offer advice on size, architecture, and ARB review.

Ms. Goodine pointed out that they were only asking for a meeting—not asking for specifics such as water and wastewater, although that might be something to talk about.

Mayor Whited said they can come to Town Council meetings and have a dialogue, and Councilors can go to theirs and do the same. He said he would welcome their comments during the public meeting, just as he has gone and provided his comments at public meetings there.

Mr. Schneider stated that he and Ms. Batson had both spent a lot of time with ESS and had gone through the latest contract negotiation with them; they came back with suggestions to improve the contract and made a substantial amount of extra overtime payments and other measures. He emphasized that ESS is a small organization, and they are not making huge profit margins on these services. He noted that at one point, he worked for Siemens Corporation—which runs water plants and sewer plants—and they start their day at 40% margins and hence make a lot of money. He said that is not what ESS does, and they do a fantastic job running the plant and keeping the Town out of trouble with DEQ. He said the County can come see what the Town is doing, as that's helpful to the system the County is managing—but ESS is already involved, and there is really nothing more to be seen.

Mayor Whited **moved** to table this item to a future date. Mr. Catlin **seconded** the motion.

Mr. Catlin said he agreed with Ms. Goodine that there's a benefit to having some informal discussions with the Board of Supervisors to explore the different options, as there may be conversations beyond the financial options.

Mayor Whited commented that it's hard for them to meet as a group in an informal way.

Mr. Catlin suggested a task-force approach.

Mr. O'Connell stated that the agenda the Board has laid out is very clear and is being purported as their goal, which is not currently an acceptable one to the Town. He said if they are able to come up with a plan for a discussion without an agenda, that is a different matter. He concurred that Council should table it.

Mayor Whited assessed that the vote was 3-2 in favor of tabling this item.

Walking Trail Discussion: Mr. Catlin said substantial work had been completed over the past month on the trail from Leggett Lane to the old schoolhouse, with most of it cut, mulched, and walkable. He stated that the bridge from Leggett Lane toward Gay Street and the boardwalk over the swampy area at the northwest corner of the pond had been built. Mr. Catlin said the trail had been cut through the woods from Leggett Lane across the bridge to Drew Mitchell's property and from the boardwalk to the edge of the woods below Gay Street, with some areas already mulched. He stated that remaining work included installing a gravel path south of the stone wall on Drew Mitchell's property and mulching the rest of the trail. Mr. Catlin said the work should be completed in the next month and that signage would be prepared. He stated that the signs would indicate that bicycles were not allowed, that the trail would be closed from dusk to dawn, and that the Town logo would likely appear at the top of each sign.

Comments from the Public

Mayor Whited opened the floor for public comment.

Ms. Donna Miller stated that she lived in Amissville in the Jackson District of Rappahannock County and served the community in several roles, including as the mother of two children. She stated that one of her children was born and raised in Rappahannock County, would graduate from those public schools, and hopefully would return to contribute. Ms. Miller said she worked as a program manager and workforce coordinator at the local community college serving Rappahannock County, where she connected regional employers with resources to recruit, train, and upskill employees. She stated that her work sometimes included encouraging the County's largest private employer to participate in job fairs at the local high school. Ms. Miller said she also served on the Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors, but appeared that night as a County citizen, taxpayer, and resident who cared deeply about the community.

Ms. Miller stated that she had heard Council consider the Board of Supervisors' request for a joint meeting and asked Council to reconsider the invitation. She said the Town and County were working on matters of mutual importance and stated that productive conversations and strong partnerships could develop when people met together in goodwill. She said she brought a caramel pecan cake as a small gesture and stated that no one had asked or instructed her to attend. Ms. Miller said she came to express her desire for everyone to meet at the same table. She stated that her professional experience had shown her that community partnerships could accomplish significant work, and the Town and County were stronger together.

Ms. Debbie Donahue, chair of the Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors, stated that she was very hopeful the theater would be available in October so they can have multiple presentations to allow everyone to ask questions and understand where things stand today. She said this was an opportunity for them all to be together.

Mr. Chris Parrish said he was no longer a member of the Board of Supervisors, and attending meetings had been the most difficult part of serving. He said he understood that another meeting might not be appealing, but a joint meeting was important because the Town and County had experienced long-standing divisions. Mr. Parrish stated that the divisions were not severe, and he commended the Town. He said he knew of no other Town without an additional real estate tax, and Washington had managed that partly because of Mr. O'Connell's efforts.

Mr. Parrish said he hoped nothing would be proposed that would hinder those efforts and stated that to his knowledge, the County was the only county in Virginia without debt, although that would change if the courthouse were built. He said he had contacted a Culpeper County supervisor about building a courthouse jointly; Culpeper's project was estimated at \$110 million, but a county courthouse had to be located in the county seat. Mr. Parrish said the Rappahannock County seat was in Washington, and occasional joint meetings between the Town and County over past decades would have been beneficial. He said Mr. Catlin had raised affordable housing, and those mandates were already beginning. Mr. Parrish stated that when

he served on the Board, the County twice faced affordable housing proposals that would have required taxpayer funding, and private efforts should be strongly supported.

Mr. John Fox Sullivan said he had been involved in Town politics and interested in County politics since 2010 and agreed that communication between the Board of Supervisors and the Town had been lacking. He stated that the issue was important to him because he believed he had made an effort during his time in Town government and cautioned against referring to either the Town or the Board of Supervisors as though each were a single entity. Mr. Sullivan said the discussion showed diverse views within the Town and stated that the Board of Supervisors also had diverse views. He said people should avoid assuming either group was completely unified or had only one opinion. Mr. Sullivan stated that people should not be driven too much by loud voices from any individual or group, and people should sit down and talk with one another as part of a shared community rather than speaking in terms of separation.

Adjournment: At 7:09 p.m., Town Council adjourned the public portion of its meeting and entered closed session.