March 10, 2015

7:00 P.M.

The Town of Pink Hill held its monthly board meeting on Tuesday, March 10, 2015 at 7:00 p.m. in the town hall board room. Present for the meeting were Mayor Carol Sykes, Commissioners Mike Hill, Donald King and Debra Grady, Town Attorney George Jenkins, Public Works Director Timmy Kennedy, Police Chief Joey Thigpen, and Town Clerk Kimberly Mitchell.

Visitors present at the meeting were County Commissioner Chairman Craig Hill, County Commissioner Roland Best, County Commissioner Linda Rouse Sutton, County Commissioner Jackie Brown, County Commissioner Reuben Davis, County Commissioner J. Mac Daughety, and County Commissioner Eric Rouse. Please see attached visitor sign in sheet for other visitors present at the meeting.

Mayor Sykes called the meeting to order. Mayor Sykes welcomed everyone to the meeting. Commissioner King then led everyone in the pledge of allegiance. Commissioner Hill made a motion to approve the regular board minutes from February 10, 2015. Commissioner Grady seconded the motion and it carried unanimously. Commissioner Hill made a motion to approve the amended agenda. Commissioner Grady seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

The first item on the agenda was the Lenoir County Commissioners. Mayor Sykes asked Town Attorney George Jenkins to read the towns Public Comment Policy. George read the policy out loud to everyone present. The policy states that comments are limited to three minutes per speaker and the speaker cannot give their allotted time to another speaker to increase that persons allotted time. After George was finished reading the policy Mayor Sykes explained why they have invited the County Commissioners to this meeting.

The first person to speak was Susan Myers. Ms. Myers read her presentation to the council and presented copies of a letter from Mrs. Lee Anne Hardy, Principal at Pink Hill Elementary, a graph of petition signatures, and pictures of kids playing at the gym. She stated she had 622 signatures on petitions asking the county to keep ownership of the gym. The signatures include taxpayers from Pink Hill, Deep Run, LaGrange, and Kinston. Ms. Myers stated that the gym is crucial to the Pink Hill/Deep Run community in many ways. She said funerals are held sometimes in the gym. She stated the most important thing is that it keeps at-risk kids off the street. Ms. Myers explained why the gym could be justified from an operational expense standpoint. In conclusion she stated that the gym is justified from a community and a financial standpoint, but they need the county to support the gym. Mayor Sykes thanked Ms. Myers for coming and speaking.

The second person to speak was Daniel White. Mr. White stated he is a corporate employee at Electrolux in Kinston and he is also operator/co-operator of a photography business in Pink Hill with his wife. He stated what he would like to see is a baseline created working with the community. He said there are baseline requirements that are needed for a community. Mr. White said the gym, playgrounds, and certain community places in these areas are baseline requirements. Mr. White said for him it really should not be a conversation but what the conversation should be is to make sure that we are covering our baseline requirements. Then if we have additional and extra financial accounts, we can discuss what can be used. He stated he would really like to see some long term agreement for working with the community. We should all work together here. He said we could say for this many years or for some time period we know this conversation is not going to come back up, but then at some point it should come back up and look at how we can make a better agreement going forward. So then we do not have to worry about as a community if our kids aren’t going to have somewhere to go. Mr. White stated let’s try to work together on this. Mayor Sykes thanked Mr. White for coming and speaking.

The third person to speak was Carolyn Whitfield. Ms. Whitfield stated she has lived in Pink Hill all of her life and has participated with the Lenoir/Kinston Recreation Department. She asked what is the difference in Pink Hill, which is part of Lenoir County and which is part of the Lenoir County/Kinston Recreation Department, as far as our recreation up here. She said we have nice fields and a gym that needs a lot of work and maybe the town needs to step up. Ms. Whitfield said the town used to have a Pink Hill Recreation Department that helped to fund a lot of things such as the concession stand which was built with that money. She said it should not even be an issue. We live in Pink Hill but we also live in Lenoir County and we should be part of Lenoir/Kinston Recreation Department. Mayor Sykes thanked Ms. Whitfield for coming and speaking.

The fourth person to speak was Clay Howard. Mr. Howard thanked the town board, county commissioners, and Mayor for having this meeting. Mr. Howard stated that recreation is a passion of his and he grew up in this town and he loves this town and he loves those ballfields and gym. He said he served on the recreation commission for 6 years and he worked hard for our recreation association for several years in Pink Hill trying to help the children, not just his children but all the children in Pink Hill and surrounding areas. Mr. Howard stated our gym is very important to the kids in this area. He said he understands that cuts have to be made sometimes in the budget but the one thing you cannot cut is the things that helps our kids. This gym helps our kids. We have so many things pulling our kids in different directions but this gym is a safe haven for them. It is a place where they can play and socialize and be safe. He stated when you cut things that affect kids, it affects everything in the city and the county. He said most kids that live here cannot jump in a car and go somewhere else outside of Pink Hill to play. They can walk to the gym and it is very important for our parents who work, for our county, and the productive citizens in this county. If you take away this gym, I think it would be the worst thing that you could do not only for Pink Hill but for the county. Mr. Howard said there seems to be some confusion, we heard that the county commissioners wanted to do away with the gym and then we read in the paper that they do not want to do away with the gym. He said one thing that he would like to say to all the parents here tonight is if you would start a recreation association and be passionate about it like you are at this meeting, then anything that you can do to help the county commissioners and help Bill Ellis, then I would guarantee you Bill Ellis and the county commissioners would help you. They always have and they always will but you have to take the step and get involved with the recreation association or start one. He stated all you parents that are here tonight come back and make an association, have tournaments, build money. That is how we got everything that we have out there and the more we did, the more we got from the county commissioners and Bill Ellis. So you have to do your part too. Mr. Howard stated kids are our future and when we turn our backs on our kids sooner or later they are going to turn their backs on the county. Mayor Sykes thanked Mr. Howard for coming and speaking.

The fifth speaker was Kerry Willis. Mr. Willis said he lives in Pink Hill and has worked with the youth population all of his life. He stated when he was a kid he was working with kids. He said he thinks the main thing that they are talking about tonight is funding because he knows everyone does not want to close the gym. He said they have not addressed that and over the years they have not addressed that. Mr. Willis said with his years of working with the youth population when he was director of Big Brothers/Big Sisters Program he learned one thing. That one thing is if you don’t get your parents involved and have the parents involved with what you are trying to do, then it is not going to happen. He said you can say it is all about the kids and he agrees but the kids are not the one that is going to be paying for it. Mr. Willis said there is no reason why we cannot turn that gym into something that will make money as well and serve the youth population. He said if you were to get a refrigerator, microwave, and stove put in there and make it a multipurpose building. He stated it could not only be used for the youth but for adults as well and bring some money into the town. Mayor Sykes thanked Mr. Willis for coming and speaking.

The sixth speaker was Jeremy Barnette. Mr. Barnette said he is a teacher at South Lenoir High School but he is speaking tonight as a head basketball coach for South Lenoir. He stated he is the lucky one because he gets to see what this gym has done for the present. He said he gets to work with kids every day that have grown up in this gym. He gets to work with kids every day where this gym has made a difference in their lives. Mr. Barnette said the gym is not just a facility for basketball but it is a community facility. He said this gym is these kids “Woodmen” and this is where they go to get away from it all. He stated he is lucky because he gets to work with great kids every day but we all know that great kids not given something to occupy them can go astray because we see it happen every day. This gym gives them something to do, it gives them a release to kind of get away, and he said he is the lucky one because he gets to see how that release has affected their life. Mr. Barnette said from the community aspect and from the relationship aspect and from just the importance of what it means to the kids and what he gets to see every day the difference it makes in their lives, there is no better investment that you can make than investing in this gym. Mayor Sykes thanked Mr. Barnette for coming and speaking.

The seventh speaker was Thomas Salter. Mr. Salter said he first wanted to thank the County Commissioners for being here tonight. He said close to some 50 years ago he had the fortunate opportunity to officiate the basketball games in the gym the night it was dedicated and the current town mayor happened to be playing ball there. Mr. Salter said he knows that they are in the middle of planning a budget and pulled in every single direction of where they need to spend the money. He stated he knows they have to set priorities. It is easy to see where you have been, obvious to see where we are now, and the foresight to see where we are going and how we are going to get there. He stated he has confidence in this committee that they will make the right decisions and do the right thing for these kids. Mr. Salter said he wanted to thank them and for taking this into consideration. Mayor Sykes thanked Mr. Salter for coming and speaking.

The eighth speaker was Kyle Howard. Mr. Howard thanked everyone for coming out this evening to hear what they had to say about the gym here in Pink Hill. He said he is not a resident of Pink Hill but of Deep Run but himself and his children as well share the gym across the road here. Mr. Howard said first of all it is not about the adults but about the kids and the young adults in this community. He said it is about their interest which is at stake here. He said if you are thinking about closing it down look at the kids not at us adults. Mr. Howard said he has been on the receiving and giving end of that gym. He said he and Bryan Harper tried to start back up the Pink Hill Recreation Association a few years back. He stated there was a lot of problems that they saw that needed to be fixed and they addressed those. They got some of them fixed but some of them they were not able to because of finances. He said had those problems been fixed when they first arrived, they wouldn’t have been such a burden to fix later and it would have been much more cost effective. Mr. Howard said with our children having a place to safely come and play, they have an opportunity to excel and succeed. He said he was on the internet a few weeks ago actually looking up something totally different for another purpose but it was on True Sport.org. He read an article that stated kids who participate in sports or in some type of sporting event are more likely to exhibit higher grades, higher expectations, great personal confidence, greater self-esteem, and greater connections with school, greater attachment to accepting support from adults, stronger peer relationships, greater family attachment, and more frequent interactions with their parents. Mr. Howard had to stop due to his time running out. Mayor Sykes thanked Mr. Howard for coming and speaking.

The ninth speaker was Dr. Ed Little. Dr. Little thanked everyone for coming tonight. He stated that he has been living here for 32 years, practices medicine here, and he and his wife have raised two children here and now their grandchildren. He said every one of those children have used the gym and ballfields. He stated it is a tremendous asset to this community. He said if the gym gets closed what alternative do we have. The new school does not really have a functioning baseball field for people to sit and watch the game, the basketball court is not really sufficient to be used for many games. The ballfields here can have three soccer games at a time, two baseball games at a time, and there is a lot of activity here many days a week. Dr. Little said every team that his grandchildren have been on recently, there have been two children who could not make away games because they had no way to get there. It is not that they can walk to Kinston so what is going to happen to those children, many of whom are disadvantaged. This is the only thing they have that keeps them occupied and gives them positive feedback. He said to remember that we pay taxes too just like the ones in Kinston do and that we deserve to have some sort of facility here. Mayor Sykes thanked Dr. Little for coming and speaking.

Mayor Sykes asked Chairman Craig Hill to come and introduce the County Commissioners. Mr. Hill stated they were glad to be here and appreciated everyone coming and speaking. Mr. Hill introduced the County Commissioner’s as follows: J. Mac Daughety, Reuben Davis, Jackie Brown, Roland Best, Linda Rouse Sutton, and Eric Rouse and himself as the Chairman. He then asked County Commissioner J. Mac Daughety to speak first.

Mr. Daughety said he was very proud of everyone that came and spoke. You spoke eloquently and passionately about the things that we all care about in Pink Hill and southern Lenoir County. He said he was very proud of them and the way that they handled themselves. He stated this came about because they had a budget session discussion about two facilities which were the Moss Hill Ruritan Building and the Pink Hill Gym. He said there were copies of the minutes of that meeting at the back if anyone would like to see them. In having those discussions he said he tried to rationalize with the folks in the meeting as to why these facilities should be left alone and why they shouldn’t be singled out of all the recreational facilities in the county. He stated he has also since then prepared cost estimates and cost comparisons to compare this facility to the facility at Southwood and they are very comparable in cost. He said they have also done the same research on the Moss Hill Ruritan Building including the fact that the cost there manually are minimal and the facility is not owned by the county but owned by the Moss Hill Ruritan’s and they maintain the liability insurance on it. Mr. Daughety said he applauds and appreciates the community coming up and being a strong voice to let people know that we care about our end of the county. He said he hopes his fellow commissioners will go back because this is not the first time these comments have come up regarding these facilities. He said we need to go back and need to resolve this issue. We need to determine and commit to the people of Moss Hill, Pink Hill, and the south end of the county that we are going to provide the exact same quality of facilities for them that we do for people in Hugo, LaGrange, Bill Faye, and Holloway Park. He said because everybody in all of those locations are equal stake holders in this county and we are all equal tax payers. Mr. Daughety said he thanked the people for their comments and their support and he is sure that these Commissioners appreciate them coming forward and hopefully they will come back with a long term commitment for them.

Mr. Craig Hill asked if any other Commissioner would like to speak on behalf of this but no one else wanted to speak. Mr. Hill said they appreciated all the work that the people have done to get to this meeting to express their concerns. He said the Commissioners in their early budget meeting have a discussion on every item in their budget which is what he hopes each of us would ask them to do as Commissioners. The two items that came up as Mr. Daughety stated was correct. He said they came up prior to him becoming on the board. Mr. Hill stated when the decision was made to build a new school here, the county was offered first right of refusal for the old school and the county refused that facility. At that point and time it went up for sale and it was sold. After about a year the building was given back to the county and the county accepted that. So they knew that it was an older structure. He said there has been no discussion about shutting this gym down and he wanted to make that perfectly clear. Mr. Hill said their issue was simply that the students need to have a place. He said when the new school was built there was a new gym added to that facility and quite honestly they would have liked to have seen that happen with better planning long range from the school system. Mr. Hill stated that did not happen so we still have the gym. The question really was here at the gym whether it was a short term or a long term fix for the recreation problems here. We would not put the kids out without having no place to be. If the decision is made to keep the gym here and bring the gym up to standard, then we have a different dialogue. Our ending point on that conversation in that budget meeting was simply this, we needed to come to you and have dialogue about this facility that is located here. Regardless of what we have been told he stated that was the end point of that conversation. He said they had already set in motion plans to come and talk with Pink Hill, LaGrange, and the city officials in Kinston about long range planning for all these communities on all subjects not just recreation but on anything that impacts the county. We understand that you are taxpayers and we understand exactly where you are coming from in regards to that and should be well represented.

Mr. Hill stated that there are three gyms in the City of Kinston that are owned by the City of Kinston and there is also the Woodmen and the Mock Gym there. The Mock Gym was put there with a lot of grant money. The Mock Gym is owned by the city along with tax dollars and grant money and the Woodmen is owned by the city and county that serves not only this whole county but the whole region. In reference to that you are unique in this community. In the Town of LaGrange recreation is served through the school system and through a different taxing component and in Contentnea-Savannah area when the old school closed there, they built a K-8 school and it has a gym large enough to serve the recreational needs there. When they came here to Pink Hill we were left out in regards to putting a school system like that here, so we have a bridge that we have to work through and we are going to work through that. All we want to do is open up dialogue with the town about this facility. He said the question is who is going to commit and how are we going to get there.

Mr. Hill said to sit here and say that they had plans to shut the gym down is not true. We have to have discussions like that and in those discussions we are going to talk openly about everything. He stated they understand our passion for this facility and for our community but what they want us to understand is they are not here to cut out programs for children. He said they were looking at where they are and looking at where they might be in 25 to 50 years down the road. How do we bridge the gap and how much money are we willing to put in this older facility, what is the risk, and how do we begin to transition to something else if that can’t be met? He stated this conversation does have to continue in every regard. He said they have a very difficult job that starts with an early budget session, then goes to the department heads and it has not even got to the department heads yet. Mr. Hill stated there are no plans to shut the gym down but there is dialogue to either make it better or figure out what to do in the future. He said there was talk about what would happen if we shut the gym down and information in regards to that but that is going to happen but it is not where we are headed. Mr. Hill said he and every single Commissioner values what is here. He stated that they are going to continue to support the town.

County Commissioner Linda Sutton was next to speak and wanted to set the record straight. She said she wanted everyone to know that Claude Stroud and herself are the two people who stood up and said the very things years ago that everyone has been saying right now and that she appreciates everyone for coming out and saying in a positive way and to get the facts and listen and we listened to you. She said if she was in the same position she would be having the same dialogue. Ms. Sutton said she appreciated everyone’s attitude and for being here tonight and how professional they were.

County Commissioner Jackie Brown was next to speak. She said she had a couple of things to say. Ms. Brown said she sympathized with everyone that was here. She said she appreciated their comments that were said so eloquently and so professional but she thinks the wrongness that we are hearing comes from the Kinston Daily Free Press. She stated the Free Press played this up to say that the gym was closing and this is not so. Ms. Brown said she would appreciate it if we would not pay any more attention to the Free Press and listen to what the Chairman and the rest of the Commissioners have to say and to offer to you as a community. She said that her grandson has played on these ballfields so she knows what is down here and what we have to offer. She thanked us for having the time out of our busy work schedule to come out and listen.

County Commissioner Eric Rouse was next to speak. Mr. Rouse thanked everyone for coming out tonight. He said everyone on the board has phone numbers and you can easily get up with them to verify the information that you are hearing. There is a lot of disinformation that has gone out on this. He said he thinks it is important to listen to the Commissioners who have spoken and who will speak. There was no plan to close the gym and ballfields have never been mentioned as far as he knows. Mr. Rouse said his home phone number is 526-0000 and that we can call him at any time and he will tell you like it is, whether he likes something or he doesn’t like something. He said he will tell you how he is going to vote. He said he is not saying he will be right all the time but he will stand up and tell you what he believes in and not hide from it. He says he votes the way he feels. Mr. Rouse said there was never any intention to close the gym. It has always been about planning and trying to seek a situation that benefits our community as a whole. He said to please make sure you understand what is happening or going on. Mr. Rouse said he would personally like to invite everyone to come to their next County Commissioner meeting.

County Commissioner Reuben Davis was next to speak. Mr. Davis said he really appreciated being invited to Pink Hill tonight. He said he was really thrilled at the turnout. Mr. Davis said he could assure us of one thing if there had been any talk about closing the gymnasium here, you wouldn’t have had to call Linda, Jackie, Roland, or Craig or anybody, you would have heard from them directly. Any time that you are going through budget sessions, you are going to discuss in a very minor manner everything pertaining to the budget and this was about 30 days ago. Mr. Davis said he thinks he has had a wonderful relationship with the people of Pink Hill. I don’t think that I have ever done anything that would have been derogatory to the citizens of Pink Hill and I don’t believe that you have got to worry about me doing anything at this point and time.

County Commissioner Roland Best was next to speak. Mr. Best said never did it come up about closing the gym because we know how important recreation is to every community. He said he gives the pledge to call them when we need to know something.

Pink Hill Commissioner Mike Hill thanked everyone for coming tonight. He said everyone has acted very professional and he appreciated that. Commissioner Hill said he would like to see more at our regular town meetings and also to attend the County Commissioner meetings because this is one way that you can get your voice heard.

Pink Hill Commissioner Donald King thanked everyone for coming out and give their opinions and their truths. He said we here in the southern part of Lenoir County feel that we are that stepchild that nobody wants anything to do with. Commissioner King wanted to know why we did not get a gym at the new school like some of the other schools did. He stated we need some answers.

Pink Hill Commissioner Debra Grady thanked all the County Commissioners for coming. She stated she is new to the board and this is the first time she has met them and was glad to get to meet them. Commissioner Grady said Pink Hill always rises to the challenge every day and she appreciates everyone taking the time to come and be a part of this meeting.

Mayor Sykes informed everyone that they would take a 5 minute recess and then continue with the meeting.

The next item on the agenda was the WASA Report. Commissioner Hill stated that Timmy is going to attend the next meeting for him. They will be discussing a financial concern with the City of Kinston. He said something was undersized during the project. He thinks most of the committee members wanted to fund this because it was not the City of Kinston’s fault, but the engineer had made a mistake and undersized something. The City of Kinston has low pressure in a certain section in their water system because of this.

The next item on the agenda was Police Updates. Chief Thigpen stated since our last meeting on February 10, 2015 they have had only 3 reported incidents, 1 accident, issued 14 citations with a total of 17 charges, and 8 warning citations. He said they have had no break-ins in homes or businesses. Chief Thigpen stated the guy who had been doing the break-ins actually got sent to prison last week and will be there for 6 years.

The Fire Department Report was next on the agenda. Timmy stated he had no call report at this time to report. He said everything is going well. They have put in for a 50/50 grant which is $22,000 and they would only have to pay half of that if it is granted to them. He said they would find out whether they get it or not about the middle of May. This would be to upgrade some equipment on their rescue truck and for some more pagers.

The next item on the agenda was Water/Sewer Updates. Timmy stated that Utility Services is scheduled to come and paint the Broadway tank again. They are going to wash it off on the outside and put another coat of paint on it. He said they are scheduled to come this Thursday or Friday to start. Timmy said so if you see anyone climbing on the tank that is why. Timmy said thanks to NC Rural Water they helped him to receive a grant to get some GIS equipment. He said that is so they can get all their valves, manholes, and all of their lines on GIS so that they can pull it up on a computer. He stated it makes everything a whole lot easier. He stated they are supposed to start training on the equipment tomorrow with Mr. Bryan Grogan.

Timmy stated their annual burnout on their water system is supposed to begin on March 16, 2015. Neuse Regional will be sending out just chlorinated water on Monday. He stated it usually takes about 5 to 7 days to reach us, so if we see them flushing a lot on the week of March 23rd that is why. He said the burnout is where they change our general disinfection, which is chloramines and how they create chloramines is with chlorine and ammonia. During the burnout they only use chlorine and every public water supply recommends you do this once a year for a period of time. This is called a burnout and it cleans the lines. Timmy also wanted to let the board know that he is scheduled to do jury duty the week of March 23rd unless he can get released from it. Commissioner King asked Timmy how the burnout was going to affect the town and would they see cloudy water. Timmy stated they should not see any difference but may smell a little more chlorine in your water but as far as seeing any difference in the color of the water, no. He said this usually will last about 3 weeks.

The next item on the agenda was H.J. Building. Mayor Sykes stated that the H.J. Building has been condemned by the building inspector. Mayor Sykes asked George how the town can get rid of that building. George stated that we can send a notice to the property owner to demolish the building within 30 days. If he does not do it, then the town can demolish it, pay for the cost of demolition and send the bill to the property owner. George said if the property owner does not pay it within 30 days, then the town can put a lien on his property taxes. In addition we can file a lawsuit against him seeking the money. He said there are state and federal taxes owed on the property, so what we could try to do is get a waiver from the federal government and Department of Revenue in Raleigh to try to get them to exempt part of this from the past due taxes. And then if anything is paid like at a foreclosure sale over and above the cost of demolition, would go to the taxing authority if they would agree to do that. Mayor Sykes asked how long it would take to find out if they would do this or not. George said it depends on which way we want to do it. He said if we want to do it through the tax foreclosure aspect that would take until the middle of next year. Mayor Sykes said the property owner is not going to pay it whether we put a lien on it or not because he already has liens on it due to property taxes owed. George said the only other alternative is for the town to pay it. Mayor Sykes stated they could not do that. She said they need to do something about that building because it collects water and causes mosquitos and it is just dangerous.

The Ruritan Signs was next on the agenda. Commissioner Hill stated that the Ruritan Club wants to put signs at all three entrances to the town which are Hwy 11 North, Hwy 11 South, and Hwy 241. The last time we did this was years ago and we actually put them on the Welcome Pink Hill Sign and if we can do that again it would eliminate us having to buy posts. He said the Ruritan Club would like to have permission to put these signs on the existing Welcome Pink Hill signs. Commissioner Hill made a motion to put the Ruritan signs on the Town of Pink Hill signs. Commissioner Grady seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

The next item on the agenda was Budget Amendments if needed. There were no budget amendments at this time.

The next item on the agenda was Remarks by Town Attorney. George stated the way this meeting was organized is a credit to the Town of Pink Hill, Town Commissioner’s, staff, and Mayor and was well set up, well handled, and the citizens showed themselves to be the kind of classy people we expect from Pink Hill.

Comments by the Board was next on the agenda. Commissioner King said he appreciated Mayor Sykes setting up this meeting and also thinks they need to direct a meeting toward the county board of schools with the school commissioners. Commissioner Grady stated she was so proud of all of us tonight and it shows that we can be a board to be reckoned with.

The next item on the agenda was Closed Session. There was no need for a closed session at this time.

With there being no further business to be discussed the meeting was adjourned.