1. **Call to Order**

Mayor Winecoff called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

**Attendance:**

Mayor Jeff Winecoff

Mayor Pro Tem David Mammay

Commissioner Kim Sherwood

Commissioner Teagan Hall

Commissioner Justin Lovin

City Manager Gordon Hargrove

Suzanne Price, Zoning Administrator

Police Chief Kevin Smith

City Clerk Tanya Shannon

1. **Public Comments and Questions**
2. Parker Knight, 1950 Albemarle Rd., thanked the Board for their time. After living in the Community for two years, he noted concerns about the perception that community voices are not adequately addressed. He would like to present a few constructive ideas for the Board's consideration.

He mentioned that there has been discussion about the potential extension of the sewer system into the Community. One comment suggested that efforts might focus on the North Shore and South Shore areas to assist residents with old septic systems. He proposed that instead of prioritizing financial assistance for those current septic system users in these areas, we should consider routing sewer lines to buildable lots, starting with the green lots and then moving on to the blue lots, where there is potential for new construction. He stated that homeowners with existing septic systems are responsible for their maintenance, and he does not believe it is the government's role to subsidize those costs. He emphasized that if you have a septic system, you are responsible for its upkeep.

He said regarding funding issues, while it is encouraging that we did not have a property tax increase, it's important to note that property values have risen since he arrived in 2022. He understands the desire to fix the roads; however, he suggests a moratorium for a period of time, allowing funds to be redirected to more pressing infrastructure problems we are facing.

Lastly, he would like to address a matter of principle. He urged the Board to reflect on who we are as a community in Boiling Spring Lakes. In the past, when the State requested approval for a new ABC store, they later withdrew the request. During that time, there were comments suggesting we would not do anything to turn down revenue. Many members of the Board expressed discomfort, yet the approval was granted. He believes that property management will always trump trying to increase revenue for any budget. He doesn't think that is the proper value system we have in the Community. Many residents have voiced their thoughts on this matter. He encouraged the Board to remember that you were elected to represent the values of our Community, not just those of one paid employee.

Commissioner Mammay responded to Mr. Knight's remarks about the sewer situation around the lake, emphasizing our focus on the large lake due to numerous failing systems that are leaking pollutants. Our priority is to protect and preserve the lake and the investments made in it.

Mr. Knight inquired if the cost of repairs would fall on homeowners. Commissioner Mammay explained that this would depend on whether we can secure grants; if not, homeowners would be responsible for the costs.

Mr. Knight noted the difficulty in proving who is causing the issue. Mayor Winecoff added that they are actively seeking grants from the State to help fund these repairs and avoid burdening taxpayers. There have been several discussions with Representative Miller and other officials to secure assistance. This is a key reason we are exploring various directions to help resolve the sewer problems and obtain state funding.

Commissioners Hall and Lovin discussed the estimated costs of connecting to the system and the ongoing search for grants, noting the challenges involved. Commissioner Sherwood added that the Grant Committee is continuously searching for grants that could benefit the Community. However, she pointed out that the process is challenging due to various requirements, including the need for matching funds to apply for those grants. She stated that this is another area they are working on.

1. Gregory Holland, 1134 N. Shore Dr., feels that many people are frustrated with the lack of transparency and don't understand what is happening in the Community. He said the City's website is the best way to provide community information. However, he said the site is stale and hard to navigate. He noted that a lot of the information needs to be updated. He does not believe that there is an effective succession plan in place. He mentioned that we lack a method for capturing institutional knowledge. He wants to ensure that all archaeological information is consistently updated, whether someone is reappointed or newly appointed. He noted that the City's Emergency Response Plan has not been updated since 2018. He mentioned that the previous Mayor had promised it would be revised annually, but that commitment has not been fulfilled.

Commissioner Mammay noted that the plan has been updated, but he is unsure why these changes are not reflected on the website.

Mayor Winecoff recently met with the Emergency Management team. He noted that Mayors from across the region gather once a month, and part of their discussions with Emergency Management included the recent rainfall and the subsequent events, particularly strategies for evacuating residents. He emphasized that Emergency Management wants to take the lead in these situations. The Mayors expressed their concerns about the implementation procedures and will continue to discuss the process.

Mr. Holland expressed his appreciation for the City having an Emergency Response Plan, but he would like to see some proactive measures taken, such as clearing out ditches and conveyance pipes. He stated you cannot raise the taxes and expect to do the job that we're not doing with the funds that we don't have.

Manager Hargrove asked for clarification on his statement. Mr. Holland said that when he drives around the City, he sees a lot of ditches that have been eroded and full of sediment, and a lot of culvert pipes under people's driveways and crossover roads are collapsing because they are full of dirt. He said the water doesn't flow regardless of whether it's a thousand-year storm. They need to be maintained so water can flow efficiently. He understands that Public Services is doing its best with limited resources and funds. But the problem is getting worse, and we are getting further behind. Mr. Holland said, "If we're going to play the game that we are not going to raise taxes and that we don't have the additional funds coming in, and yes, we keep spending more money because we give raises to people, which they deserve. But, X plus Y has to equal Z somewhere in this equation, meaning we have to come up with some more money."

Manager Hargrove thanked Mr. Holland for his clarification. He noted that in their previous conversations, it was established that taxes have not been increased and that the City's current tax rate limits the level of service that can be provided. He emphasized that this doesn't imply they are not doing a good job; it simply reflects the available resources. Mr. Hargrove stated that since the recent storms, residents have not just been requesting additional services; they are demanding them, particularly concerning stormwater management and road repairs. He discussed several potential mechanisms for increasing funding, such as raising the ad valorem tax and possibly establishing a stormwater fee. He noted that the funds generated from such a fee would be specifically allocated for stormwater-related projects. However, he emphasized that there are many other pressing needs, including Dam maintenance, ongoing upkeep, and disaster recovery efforts. The City requires additional funding options to meet the higher levels of services that citizens demand.

Mr. Holland thanked the Board for their time and offered assistance wherever needed.

1. Mike Price from South Shore Drive inquired about the status of the no-rise analysis and the reasons behind FEMA's involvement in this matter. Mr. Hargrove responded that he received a preliminary report from the consulting engineers indicating that a half mile of shoreline would be impacted. He noted that this half-mile shoreline along the big lake does not require a no-rise certification. However, he could not specify which section of the shoreline, as it is part of the preliminary findings. Mr. Hargrove explained that everyone else constructing a dock extending into the lake would need to obtain a no-rise certification. The situation is still being navigated. He emphasized that the complete report is not yet available. Furthermore, he clarified that the matter is not driven by FEMA but rather by the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). This program requires that any structures in the floodway must demonstrate that they will not cause a rise in water levels. He explained that failure to comply with these regulations can lead to a Community Assistance Visit (CAV), which functions like an audit. For example, if someone builds a dock on their property without a no-rise certificate, the City could be deemed in violation. If this issue is not rectified, it could jeopardize insurance coverage for everyone participating in the NFIP and cause people to have to get insurance through third-party insurance companies, which often charge significantly higher rates. Mr. Hargrove emphasized the necessity of obtaining no-rise certifications for docks, seawalls, and anything within the floodway.

Ms. Suzanne Price, Zoning Technician, explained that if the seawall/bulkhead or dock can be verified through tax records as having been built or rebuilt in 2006 or earlier, a no-rise study will not be necessary since it is already included in the 2006 study. The requirement she mentioned applies solely to individuals who intend to build new docks or bulkheads within the floodway. Mr. Price indicated that this would have a significant impact on most property owners around the lake. The Board also expressed their frustration and will await the final report from the consulting engineer.

1. Shannon Van Deren, 320 Pine Lake Road reported that she routinely shares updates from the regular monthly Board meetings for a regular resident review on Facebook. She commented in the review that the Mayor does not wish to increase property taxes, to which she received a reply stating, "In fact, my property taxes did go up." She wanted to clarify for the viewers that although property assessments had increased, the tax rate itself had not changed. Mayor Winecoff said that was correct. Ms. Van Deren also discussed the concept of using a percentage increase tax rate versus a flat fee. She expressed her hope that her property's value will continue to rise. If property values increase at a set rate, she believes that whatever amount she pays today could potentially grow even higher over the next five years. Thus, she would prefer a flat fee that remains stable rather than one that fluctuates upwards.

She said that other comments that she has gotten are that we have had these repairs and FEMA has approved them, but the City's obligation is to pay them initially, and then they will respond with reimbursement upon job completion with receipts provided. However, we are not funded to prepay and we have to seek that funding. She said some of the comments that have come back were, "We voted through this referendum. Where is that money?" Mayor Winecoff replied that the money is still there and has not been touched. It is for the Dams only. Ms. Van Deren said that the referendum money has not been used, and even though we passed it, we are under no obligation to use it. Mayor Winecoff said that is correct. Commissioner Sherwood reiterated that those funds are for the Dam repairs only.

Ms. Van Deren inquired about funding to address the damage caused by the previous storm to the Dam, specifically asking if the estimated cost would be approximately $8.5 million. Mr. Hargrove said that is correct, but keep in mind that we're not looking for funding for $8.5 million. The City's position is that the contractor owns that project from start to finish. We will assist them through the FEMA process once their insurance has maxed out. Our main priority right now is securing funding to repair the damage to the roads. Mr. Van Deren responded that the washout referenced at the last meeting was pertinent to roads rather than the Dams for the $2.5-3 Million Dollar range. Mr. Hargrove said that was correct.

Ms. Van Deren clarified that the Board passed the agreement for six police vehicles with Enterprise Management at the December 3rd meeting, but some residents were unsure if it was approved. She was grateful that the police received approval for the necessary vehicles.

She mentioned that she thinks these forums are great for having open discussions. It's a good chance for people to ask questions and get their concerns addressed. However, she also pointed out that there are some armchair commentators who aren't involved in the conversations. She also asked what we could do to be more transparent and how the Community can help raise voices appropriately and responsively. Plus, she wanted to know if any changes are coming in the new year to be more thorough. Also, she agreed that the website is challenging to navigate. She asked for thoughts on how to alleviate some of the Community's distrust. Mayor Winecoff said that the meetings are always open to everyone. He said he could be contacted anytime, as his phone number is posted, and he always returns calls. He said he did the "fire-side chat" that Ms. Van Deren requested and posted it on Facebook to let people know what was going on, but he said it has to be the citizens who want to learn and understand more.

Mayor Winecoff said he is out there and attends every event if possible. He said if anyone wants to talk to him, they are always welcome to. He said he likes the idea of having a monthly chat to post online. He said our job is to work for the people. We have to be accessible to answer questions and talk to people if they need help, and if they need something else, we need to be available to do that.

Commissioner Lovin said he would like to piggyback on those comments and that the Board's contact information is posted on the City's website. He said people often reach out to him by phone, email, or on the street. He said instead of being on Facebook and complaining, they should contact us by email, not by text message or phone call, but by email, so there is a paper trail.

Mayor Winecoff said he went to Facebook yesterday to help and answer questions, but the minute you start doing that, you automatically get attacked. He said it is open season, and at some point, you are tired of being attacked, so he decided he wouldn't answer any questions on Facebook. So I mean, the whole idea is we're not here to fight. We are here to help. You got some that will still not be pleased no matter what you do.

Ms. Van Deren said that was an interesting segue because one of my complaints, and I have been vocal about this, is coming to the meetings and only being able to talk at you for 5 minutes. Sometimes, it might be the 42nd question, but I do not get any answers or comments back. Sometimes, it feeds into the City Manager's report and helps answer some of her questions based on the agenda. She said some of the things she hears from the Community here is that they don't come to the meetings anymore because they don't feel it is worthwhile and aren't being listened to. She said they say the decisions are being made anyway, and the agenda only highlights what you are preparing to vote on and the discussions surrounding it. So our knowledge base walking in here is potentially or even intentionally minimal, and we don't get to know that. So, when there's not any volley of discussion she had suggested before, perhaps put an earmark of time on the agenda for questions (maybe 2-4) and address them. Participating can become very discouraging when there is no reward, such as receiving an answer to the inquiry.

Mr. Hargrove said that he has been with the City for a little over two years and sees the same people come to the Commissioner's meetings. He said the people saying that they quit coming because they don't get a response or feel like they are not being heard are not coming to talk to this group because I see the same group sitting here every single time. He said I would advise them to come and visit us, as we are here for everyone. He said I want to talk about transparency for a minute. He said we have a way to do business inside the City Hall, and it's not just how we do business; it's how all jurisdictions across the State of North Carolina do business. One of the things that he said he does is pay particular attention to how we go about our daily business. One of those is the information that we get. You have to be forthcoming with information and go about it the right way. When you want to know information, for example, about the police fleet, budgets, or anything else, all you have to do is go to the city website and put in a public records request. He said when you put in the request, he would be more than happy to provide those answers. He said it is important to do it this way so we can track that information to be accurate and our messaging can be consistent. He said the problem that has happened in the past is you send a random department head a question and it gets a response that nobody else knows about, so in 10 years, there is no record of that. If you put in a public request for information, we have that record to track it and ensure our messaging is consistent. It’s not that we're trying to be non-transparent. This is how the process works.

 Mr. Hargrove said that he thinks another problem that we have about transparency is the business of the public running a public sector organization like this is completely different than the private sector. He said there are some similarities and parallels. However, what we must do in the public sector is entirely different from what we do in the private sector. We have a statutory framework that we have to work around. He said sometimes people don't see that and confuse the public with the private sector. Lastly, we will improve communication and understanding. Also, he said transparency can be achieved by having a Citizens Academy that meets monthly and goes over how the government works. He said we start with administration and move to departments, and how planning and zoning operate is how you communicate. He said with everything we have going on right now, time is golden for us so you want to know how we can improve. Follow the process, and we will happily provide the information.

Ms. Van Deren said she did not know about the public records request online and that was the procedure. She said she will use this process and share it with others. She questioned how to navigate the request form on the City's website. Ms. Price informed everyone where to locate the public request form.

Commissioner Mammay told Ms. Van Deren that we appreciate your post about the meetings and what occurred. However, he said there seem to be some things that seem problematic for me. He reads the comments and then reads that people say things like the City funded things that they didn't like, what is going on HWY 87 that is not the City that is the developer, and the dog trail, and like the Mayor said if we happen to put our name out there. Here it comes. You better duck. He said people don't understand that he is just trying to help. Ms. Van Deren asked if it would be your preference that the summaries of the meetings not be posted. Commissioner Mammay said that during the last Board meeting review, the Board approved $25,100.00 for Task Order #34 for Dam Hydraulic Testing. He said it was quoted that the "entire board" approved it. He said he opposed it, and it is misleading to write it this way. Ms. Van Deren asked so would you instead, I stated the vote was 4 to 1. The Commissioner said 4-1 would be the correct way to state it. People think that sometimes we all say yes to everything, but we don't all say yes to everything. Commissioner Mammay said he does not want the people to think we are just a bunch of "yes men."

Van Deren said that she was very happy to do that and that she could understand what he meant, and she appreciated Commissioner Mammay for saying that. She said you all go so fast with votes that I am writing and trying to be factual, and I don't know your voices by heart, and if the Commissioners are talking to Mayor Winecoff and not to us, it is hard to get exactly how each person voted. Commissioner Mammay said I want to bring to attention that he specifically clarified to the public and the clerk that his vote was a no on the motion. He thinks providing information is good, but providing partial information is worse than anything else.

Mayor Winecoff said that he would like to touch base on what Mr. Hargrove said and that he once started a Citizens Academy elsewhere, which was a huge success. He said it takes you through every single department and the procedures they have to follow to get stuff done, and it allows everyone to learn the process. After graduation, you'll grasp the complexities of government and the challenges of accomplishing simple tasks. He said people ask how they can help. He said if you are a part of this academy and learn what the City is and when people ask all these questions, you now have the knowledge to explain and understand how the process works.

Ms. Van Deren thanked the Board for their time.

1. Ms. Lucille Launderville, 370 Pink Lake Rd., believes social media is a huge nationwide problem. Although she commends what Ms. Van Deren does, she said sometimes the keyboard warriors jump in and condemn the Board for things they do or what they report on. She said if people were genuinely interested, they would attend the meetings in person rather than sit behind a keyboard.

Mayor Winecoff provided a brief update on a meeting he had with the developer for Food Lion, which is working with the grocery store chain to get them to come in here. He said we were hoping to find some information out very soon. Mayor Winecoff noted that the developer said he was 99% sure they were coming, but Mayor Winecoff said we won't know for sure until it is on paper. Mayor Winecoff has asked for some plans to be submitted in January for the public to review and have a forum where everyone can look at the sketches of what they are planning and have some input on what they are planning.

Mr. Knight asked how do we come to understand what the developer does and what the town authorizes or approves and how it supports it with infrastructure to let these developments happen so we can be able to say who is allowing this. Commissioner Sherwood said it is within the zoning districts and what is allowable in that specific district. Ms. Price also explained that the proposed Food Lion development first came in as a text amendment to the Planning Department and then to the Planning Board. The Planning Board reviewed it and agreed that it met the requirements. Then she said it went to the Board of Commissioners, and they had a hearing, and it passed. She said that they must be approved when all the requirements are met. She explained the entire process. Mr. Knight said that the Citizens Academy would be an excellent way for people to learn this type of information and become more aware of how the development process works.

Ms. Launderville inquired about the reopening of E. Boiling Spring Rd. Mr. Hargrove estimated it would be open sometime in the spring. Mayor Winecoff requested that the road restoration be treated as a top priority.

Mayor Winecoff thanked everyone for attending, invited everyone to the Tree Lighting Ceremony, and wished everyone a Merry Christmas.

Commissioner Mammay motioned to adjourn, and Commissioner Sherwood made a second. ***Unanimous Vote; Motion Carried.***

-Adjourn 6:57 P.M.

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 Mayor, Jeff Winecoff

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 City Clerk, Tanya Shannon