

Town of Talking Rock Monthly Meeting Minutes

September 4th, 2025

Mayor James Bryant called the meeting to order at 7:00pm

I. Attendance

Board:

James Bryant

Jason Little

Lynda Cagle

Darlene O'Connell

Caleb Gay

City Manager/Clerk: Amanda Buntin

Others in attendance:

Mari Livsey, Jene Bryant, Jim Bauman, Judson Bourke, Dusty Eaton, Cheryl Sams, Matt Schmitz Jr

II. Call Meeting to Order:

III. Pledge of Allegiance:

IV. Announcements: Mayor Bryant informed the community that the annual Heritage Day festival is approaching in several months. The Daughters of the American Revolution have expressed interest in participating this year, and their involvement is welcomed. In addition, the mayor announced that Matt and Lorie Schmitz have acquired the former Moose and Annie building in town. Mr. Schmitz, present at the meeting, shared that his family relocated to Canton, GA approximately one year ago and that he works in real estate. During a client search, he discovered Talking Rock and the opportunity to acquire the former antique store, which he subsequently purchased. He conveyed his enthusiasm for joining the community and commencing operations at his new store, Talking Rock 1883. Mayor Bryant also addressed a recent incident involving a homeless couple camping illegally in the town park. Law enforcement was called to resolve the situation; the couple left behind property, which had not been collected by the time of the meeting. The city manager has provided a 24-hour window for retrieval before the items are disposed of. The mayor urged all residents to remain vigilant and report any unusual activity to law enforcement as appropriate.

V. Approval August 2025 Meeting Minutes: A motion was made by Caleb Gay, seconded by Jason Little to approve the May 2025 meeting minutes. All voted unanimously in favor, except Tony Hawf who was not present.

VI. Approval of August 2025 Financial Reports: A motion was made by Darlene O'Connell to approve the May 2025 Financial Reports, seconded by Lynda Cagle. All voted unanimously in favor, except Tony Hawf who was not present.

VII. Summary of Maintenance: Jim Baumann announced that the lights in the Town Hall had been replaced as well as the drainage system being replaced at the park. There happened to be a major storm the day after it was completed, and it held up perfectly. Jim also stated that he was able to fix the mower himself, and it saved the town a substantial amount of money. There was a loose board over at the train cars Bar and Grill that was replaced. Mr. Baumann asked if we could purchase new 2 roll toilet paper roll holders for the park restrooms due to the park being used so often on the weekends. Mayor Bryant stated that he would approve of this and for Mr. Baumann to get together with the city manager to order them.

VIII. Old Business:

- A. **Vote on a Quote to fix the Drainage System at the Park:** The council voted to have Phoenix Landscaping do the work at the park. It was completed by the time of this meeting.
- B. **Vote on a Quote to Purchase an Underground Propane Tank:** The council selected a quote from Appalachian propane to purchase the tank and a quote from Blossman gas to install it.
- C. **Vote on Land Survey Quote:** The council voted to accept the quote from Keystone surveys. It was completed by the time of this meeting.
- D. **Crosswalk Update:** The city manager announced that she was able to get in touch with someone at Patriot Railroad and is currently working on getting a permit to do the sidewalks over at the train tracks.
- E. **Sign a new Franchise Agreement Between the Town and Ellijay Telephone Communications Company Through the TRM Contract with GMA:** The town entered into a new agreement with ETC for a higher percentage than the town was currently receiving. All members voted to enter this contract unanimously.

IX. New Business:

- A. **Vote on a new Insurance Company Contract for the Town:** The city manager identified GIRMA, a company specializing in municipal insurance, as a potential provider. GIRMA is highly recommended by both GMA and Nelson GA, who currently utilize their services. The city manager reported that transitioning to GIRMA would result in substantial savings for the town compared to its existing policy, particularly as the current policy does not cover train cars—requiring additional coverage that would further increase costs. Under GIRMA, annual premiums are estimated at approximately \$5,200, whereas the present policy costs \$9,400 per year. Following discussion, the council voted to proceed with GIRMA and include train car coverage. Caleb Gay moved to accept the new contract with GIRMA, seconded by Darlene O'Connell. The motion passed unanimously, except for Tony Hawf, who was absent.
- B. **Update on Projects:** The drainage system has been completely redone at the park. The underground propane tank will be put in next week. The crosswalk permit is being looked at with the railroad permit being filled out to complete the sidewalks. The land survey for the dumpsters to be moved has been completed and we will be continuing forward looking into what it'll take to move the dumpsters across the road.
- C. **Discussion on new Town Ordinances for STR (Short Term rentals) and Hotel/Motel:** The city manager requested that the mayor and council review ordinances from other small municipalities to help inform the development of an ordinance for Talking Rock regarding Short-Term Rentals. Several residents have inquired about operating Bed & Breakfast establishments or similar ventures, seeking clarification on license and adhere to applicable noise ordinances. The city manager expressed an intention to incorporate these provisions into the town charter by year-end. Addressing issues related to hotels and motels will likely require additional time, as it involves tax considerations and coordination with county authorities. She encouraged the council to begin considering these matters.
- D. **Discussion on moving the town bank accounts to a different bank:** The city manager raised the issue that the current bank does not have a contract with QuickBooks, which is the primary accounting software employed by the Town of Talking Rock. Transitioning to a financial institution compatible with QuickBooks would offer significant advantages. Additionally, it was discovered that switching banks could provide several benefits, such as increased interest rates. Both the city manager and

the mayor emphasized their appreciation for the existing bank and its exemplary staff: the discussion regarding a potential change is based solely on the necessity for software compatibility, not on dissatisfaction with service. The mayor and council concerned, and Lynda Cagle recommended that the city manager explore Renasant Bank, a locally operated bank, aligning with the towns commitment to supporting the local community and fostering opportunities for its citizens.

- X. **Adjourn:** A motion was made by Darlene O'Connell to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Jason Little at 7:29pm. All voted unanimously in favor, except for Tony Hawf who was not present.

The next regular council meeting will be October 2nd, 2025, at 7pm with the working group session beginning the same day at 5:30pm.

James W. Bryant Jr. Mayor

Lynda Cagle

Tony Hawf

Caleb Gay

Jason Little

Assisted by: Amanda Buntin

Darlene O'Connell