

Town of Taylorsville



TOWN COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Town Council Chambers

Tuesday, March 17, 2026 at 2:00 p.m.

Prepared By: Nicole Mayes

Present: Mayor George Holleman
Mayor Pro Tem Eric Bumgarner
Councilwoman Tamara Odom
Councilwoman Kim Brown
Councilman Jack Simms

Mayor George Holleman left the work session at 3:27 pm.

Call to Order, Invocation, Pledge of Allegiance

George B. Holleman, Mayor

The Town Council Work Session was called to order on Tuesday, March 17, 2026, at 2:00 pm by Mayor George Holleman. No formal invocation was performed, and the council proceeded directly to the preliminary items on the agenda.

Discussion Items

1. Economic Development Industrial Incentives

Nathan Hester, Town Manager

Town Manager Nathan Hester introduced a proposed industrial incentive program designed to attract new large-scale industries to the Town and encourage the expansion of existing local businesses. The program is modeled after the current county-level incentives to ensure regional consistency.

- **Eligibility:** The program applies to new industries, existing industries, or properties seeking annexation.
- **Investment Thresholds:** Mr. Hester highlighted that the minimum investment for an existing industry to qualify is \$500,000, while new industries require a minimum of \$2 million.
- **Mechanism:** The incentive functions as a property tax reimbursement over a five-year period, where the company pays its current taxes and is reimbursed for a portion of the prior year's taxes.

Council Inquiry and Discussion

Reimbursement Structure: Councilmember Eric Bumgarner inquired if the reimbursement rate would be 100%. Mr. Hester clarified that while 100% is possible, a typical "step-down" approach is used (e.g., 90%

in year one, decreasing to 30% by year five). He emphasized that payments only begin once a project is finished and operable, and they are tied strictly to meeting job creation and wage requirements.

Financial Impact: Councilmember Kim Brown sought clarification on whether the Town would be "fronting" money. Mr. Hester and Mayor George Holleman confirmed that this is a tax-back incentive, not a capital outlay. Mayor Holleman cited the past example of Piedmont Fiberglass, noting that reimbursements only occurred once the new value was added to the tax books and the company began paying those taxes.

Annexation and Strategy: Councilmember Brown asked about the possibility of industries seeking "spot annexation" to qualify. Town Attorney Monroe Pannell explained that satellite annexations are common, often driven by a business's desire for city utility rates.

Councilmember Tamara Odom and Councilmember Jack Simms discussed the geographic scope, with Mr. Hester noting the program would focus on a three-mile radius of the Town. Councilmember Bumgarner suggested being aggressive with the program to attract businesses currently located in the industrial park, noting that while some are outside town limits now, their growth represents future revenue.

Negotiation vs. Fixed Rates: Councilmember Bumgarner expressed a preference for set, non-negotiable rates across the board to ensure clarity. Attorney Pannell advised that while the Council can choose to be firm, the current language provides "guidelines" that allow the Town to remain flexible during negotiations with major employers.

Legal and Administrative Guidance

Town Attorney Pannell recommended keeping the program consistent with the County for simplicity. He suggested that while some might prefer "frontloading" incentives to help a business with startup costs, "backloading" them (higher percentages in later years) could be used to ensure a company remains in the area for the full five-year term.

Conclusion

Councilmember Odom noted the importance of having the program ready for future opportunities. Councilmember Bumgarner advocated for a swift adoption of the policy to begin recruitment efforts immediately. Town Manager Hester concluded by stating he would finalize grammatical corrections for the final draft.

2. Sign Ordinance Update Discussion

Nathan Hester, Town Manager

Town Manager Nathan Hester opened the discussion by identifying several unresolved items in the current sign ordinance, specifically regarding the use of awning signs and the use of automobiles as signage. He requested direction from the Council on whether to allow these practices moving forward, prohibit them, or grandfather in existing examples.

Vehicle and Antique Signage

The Council discussion regarding the regulation of unconventional signs, specifically the use of automobiles as permanent signage (citing a local antique store as a current example).

- **Council Feedback:** Councilmember Kim Brown expressed support for the aesthetic of the existing vehicle sign. However, Mr. Hester raised concerns about the potential for less-maintained or "rusted" vehicles being used throughout town if left unregulated.

- **Grandfathering:** Mr. Hester recommended that any existing signs currently in place be "grandfathered in" indefinitely, noting that requiring removal after several decades is often counterproductive.
- **Proposed Solution:** Councilmember Bumgarner suggested that such signs could be allowed subject to Board approval. Mr. Hester noted this could be managed via a Special Use Permit to ensure aesthetic standards are met.

Electronic Message Boards and Consistency

The Council discussed Section D7 of the prohibited signs list, which restricts moving or animated signs.

- **Government Exemptions:** Councilmember Bumgarner and Councilmember Brown expressed concerns regarding "hypocrisy" if government entities are exempt from rules that apply to private citizens.
- **Safety vs. Communication:** Mr. Hester explained that the county uses message boards for public information, whereas private flashing signs on Highway 16 can be a distraction to drivers.
- **Regulatory Consensus:** Councilmember Tamara Odom noted that regulations are necessary because such signs are considered traffic deterrents. The Council reached a consensus to allow these signs provided they meet specific safety parameters. Mr. Hester committed to adding regulations regarding scroll speed and brightness levels for the Council to review in April.

Awning and Canopy Signs

The discussion moved to the consistency of signage on building awnings, particularly for downtown businesses.

- **Proposed Standard:** Mr. Hester proposed that awnings be limited to displaying only the street address rather than business names.
- **Rationale:** Mr. Hester noted that because many downtown occupants are renters, business names on awnings often become outdated when tenants change, and new renters or owners may be reluctant to replace them. Councilmember Tamara Odom added that outdated names on awnings cause confusion for shoppers who cannot identify the current business. By limiting awnings to addresses, the Town provides consistency and reduces long-term costs for property owners.
- **Alternative:** Businesses would instead use hanging signs suspended from the awning to identify their specific storefront.

Political Signage and Enforcement

- **Political Signs:** Councilmember Brown inquired if vehicle sign restrictions would apply to political candidates. Mr. Hester clarified that the Board had previously reached a consensus not to regulate political signage, a position Councilmember Bumgarner reaffirmed.
- **Enforcement:** In response to questions from Councilmember Brown regarding who would "police" these new rules, Mr. Hester confirmed that enforcement is handled through the Town's contract with Alexander County Planning & Zoning.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Town Manager Hester will draft specific parameters for electronic message boards (addressing brightness and motion speed) and present the revised ordinance for further discussion at the April meeting.

3. Solid Waste Ordinance Discussion

Nathan Hester, Town Manager

Town Manager Nathan Hester initiated a review of Section 50.14 regarding Special Collections, Yard Waste, and Bulk Items. He outlined the existing restrictions as currently written in the town code:

- **Definition:** Yard waste includes grass, weeds, leaves, and small trimmings generated from routine maintenance.
- **Exclusions:** The current ordinance strictly prohibits the collection of stumps, waste from commercial tree services, and any debris resulting from land clearing.
- **Size Limits:** Items exceeding six feet in length or four inches in diameter are currently ineligible for pickup.
- **Volume:** Collection is currently limited to one truckload per residence.

Council Discussion on Residential Challenges

The Council discussed the practical difficulties citizens face under the current restrictive language, particularly following storms or natural events.

- **Storm Debris and Natural Disasters:** Councilmember Eric Bumgarner shared a past experience regarding a fallen magnolia tree, questioning if "extenuating circumstances" like ice storms should override the policy. Councilmember Kim Brown argued that the Town should be obligated to assist when a limb falls due to a natural event, especially if the homeowner performs the labor of cutting it themselves rather than hiring a professional.
- **Support for Vulnerable Citizens:** Councilmember Simms expressed strong concerns regarding elderly or widowed residents who lack the means to haul off large debris. He cited a specific recent example of a fallen Bradford pear tree and reminded the Board that the Town recently increased environmental fees and previously invested in equipment (a dump truck and grappling hook) specifically to provide these services to taxpayers.
- **Service Quality:** Councilmember Brown noted concerns regarding the methods used for pickup, mentioning that using backhoes instead of grappling hooks often damages residential grass and creates additional work for the homeowner.

Proposed Revisions and Policy Shift

The Board debated where to draw the line between routine yard waste and major tree removal.

- **Service Limits:** Mr. Hester cautioned that while the Town can be more lenient, there must still be a manageable limit to prevent the Town from being responsible for clearing entire yards.
- **Commercial vs. Residential:** Councilmember Bumgarner suggested that while the Town should pick up limbs drug to the curb by homeowners regardless of the amount, debris from commercial companies should remain the responsibility of those contractors.
- **Emergency Protocols:** Public Works Manager Aaron Wikes noted that during declared states of emergency, policies are generally adjusted, though the collection of large trunks typically remains restricted.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The Town Manager will draft new verbiage for the Solid Waste Ordinance to allow for the collection of trees and larger debris under specified conditions.

- **Timeline:** The revised ordinance will be presented for Council review during the April Work Session.
- **Public Hearing:** The council will establish a public hearing to be scheduled in May to allow for formal adoption of the changes.

4. Budget Discussion – FY 26-27

Nathan Hester, Town Manager

Town Manager Nathan Hester presented the preliminary budget outlook for the 2026-2027 fiscal year.

- **Tax Base:** The Town's total tax base is \$274.9 million. At the current rate of \$0.35 per \$100, one cent on the tax rate generates \$27,490.
- **Inflationary Concerns:** Mr. Hester identified rising fuel costs and material expenses as primary concerns.
- **Investments:** The Town currently holds \$6.3 million in Certificates of Deposit (CDs), split 60/40 between the Water-Sewer and General Funds. With interest rates expected to drop to 4% this summer.

Water and Sewer Fund

Mr. Hester reported that revenue is currently down due to conservation efforts at the prison and decreased industrial usage.

- **Usage Trends: Public Works Manage Aaron Wikes** noted that a wet summer resulted in lower residential water consumption during peak months (July–September).
- **Cost Increase:** The Town's water supplier (City of Newton via Energy United) is implementing a \$0.06 per 1,000-gallon increase based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
- **Rate Adjustments:** Councilmember Simms asked if a water increase automatically raises sewer rates; Mr. Wike clarified it does not, but noted the Town cannot afford to absorb the \$0.06 cost. Councilmember Kim Brown stated that the Town should not operate at a loss where it is essentially "paying for the water," and Town Attorney Monroe Pannell clarified that these costs are the responsibility of the rate payers, not the general taxpayers. Mr. Wike advised that consistent small annual increases (1–2%) are preferable to large, infrequent jumps.

Personnel and Benefits

- **COLA:** Mr. Hester proposed a 3% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) at an estimated cost of \$49,000 to remain competitive for employee retention.
- **Funding Split:** Mr. Wike pointed out that the COLA impact would be heavier on the General Fund because the Police Department staff is larger than Public Works. Mr. Hester noted that since the General Fund relies almost solely on taxes, a rate increase might be necessary to fund the COLA.

- **Insurance:** Mr. Hester informed the Council that the Town would lose a \$30,000 premium reduction incentive this year. He is currently looking at different plan options through the Hilb Group and exploring the addition of a YMCA membership benefit for staff.

Capital Outlay and Public Works

- **Vehicle Replacement:** Mr. Hester and Mr. Wike discussed replacing a small brush truck (\$85k–\$100k new). Mr. Wike recommended buying used with low mileage to establish a staggered replacement schedule.
- **Equipment Status:** Councilmember Brown questioned the need for new vehicles, pointing out that several staff members (Aaron, Kelly, Luke, Dustin) are driving relatively new trucks. Mr. Wike clarified that those replaced 1999 and 2000 models, and the current request is to replace the 200,000-mile trucks used by part-time staff.
- **Service Priorities:** Councilmember Brown stated she could not support buying trucks for part-time staff when the Town cannot pressure washing sidewalks. Mr. Hester responded that the Town is operating on a "skeleton budget" of \$0.30 (after the \$0.05 fire tax), which limits the services provided.
- **Infrastructure Tools:** Mr. Hester noted the budget would include smaller capital items like a pipe bursting machine.

Economic Development & Land Acquisition

- **Spec Building:** Mr. Hester proposed a partnership with the Taylorsville Development Alliance to build a 25,000 sq. ft. spec building. Councilmember Simms and Mr. Wike inquired about interest; Mr. Hester confirmed he has two potential businesses interested in leasing such a space.
- **Urgent Care:** Mr. Hester reported the sale of the former Urgent Care building to Dr. Xiong. The Town will provide a \$7,500 match for a building reuse grant administered by the COG.
- **Sports Complex:** Mr. Hester and Mr. Wike discussed the need for 75–100 acres for a sports complex. Attorney Pannell confirmed the Town could purchase and annex land outside the three-mile radius. Mr. Wike suggested finding land outside city limits to keep the property value on the tax books, while Councilmember Bumgarner and Mr. Hester emphasized the benefit of bringing regional traffic close to town to support local businesses and hotels.

Feasibility Studies and Planning

- **Wastewater (WWTP):** Mr. Hester stated the Town would need to look into increasing its 850,000-gallon daily capacity once it hits the 600,000-gallon mark. He proposed a \$500,000 EDA grant study (with a \$100,000 Town match) to evaluate building a new plant on the east side near the industrial park. Councilmember Brown and Councilmember Bumgarner noted this would significantly improve industrial recruitment and relieve pressure on existing pump stations.
- **Water Independence:** Mr. Hester and Mr. Wike discussed a joint study with Alexander County and Energy United for a new water tank, with the Town acting as the lead applicant.
- **Parks & Cemetery:** Mr. Hester noted a \$50,000 Master Park Plan is required for state grants. Mr. Wike detailed a \$15k–\$20k GIS mapping project for the cemetery that would integrate with the Town website.

Conclusion

Mr. Hester summarized the budget priorities: employee compensation, capital projects, and land acquisition. Councilmember Brown questioned if a small tax increase would be sufficient, while Councilmember Tamara Odom noted that "you have to start somewhere."

City Managers Report

Facility Maintenance: Mr. Hester reported that the HVAC units for both the Police Department and Town Hall sides are inoperable. He presented a quote from Keever’s Heating and Air for \$10,400 for one unit and \$10,000 for the second.

Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, the Mayor Pro Tem Eric Bumgarner requested a motion to adjourn at 4:51 pm.

Motion to adjourn was made by Councilmember Kim Brown, seconded by Councilmember Tamara Odom, and approved unanimously.

Mayor

Councilmember

Councilmember

Councilmember

Councilmember

Attest: _____
Nicole Mayes, Town Clerk