

TOWN OF RANLO BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS SPECIAL MEETING

RANLO LODGE

2000 SPENCER MOUNTAIN ROAD, RANLO, NORTH CAROLINA 28054

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26TH, 2026

MINUTES

Governing Body Present

Mayor Corey Creech

Mayor Pro-Tem Robin Conner

Commissioner Ronnie Laws

Commissioner Effie Locklear

Commissioner Schivette Hill

Staff Present

Town Manager Charlie Hansen

Police Chief Jimmy Lunsford

Finance Director Reagan Day

Town Attorney Nick Tosco

I. Call to Order and Invocation

Mayor Creech called the Special Meeting of the Board to order and led in invocation on Thursday, February 26th, 2026, at 7:00 PM at the Ranlo Lodge.

II. Roll Call

The Town Clerk conducted the roll call. Commissioner Doug Moore was absent

III. Adoption of the February 26thth, Agenda

Motion to adopt the agenda was made by Commissioner Laws and seconded by Commissioner Locklear. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Comments from Attendees

Gewreka Robert- 2908 Teton Dr.

Gewreka Robert addressed the board, expressing her goal to help strengthen the sense of community in the town of Ranlo. She emphasized her willingness to serve the residents and help create a place where people live, play, and recreate together. Robinson stated she was willing to serve on the Ranlo Experience committee being established.

New Business:

V. Discussion of the New Public Safety Related Committee-Commissioner Hill

Commissioner Hill discussed the formation of a new public safety committee to assist with the police department. She explained that during conversations with the Police Chief, they discussed implementing a cadet program for residents to prepare them for the police academy, which they can enter at starting at age 19-20. Commissioner Hill noted that while the Police Chief loved the idea, he lacked the manpower to implement it, which led to the committee concept.

The Mayor asked for more details about what the program would look like. Commissioner Hill and the Police Chief explained that it would involve helping interested residents understand the path to becoming a police officer, showing them the requirements, and guiding them in the right direction. The training would be provided by colleges, and the program would focus on helping residents take the necessary steps to enter law enforcement.

Town Manager Charlie Hansen explained that the committee would exist to create and build the program, as current staff capacity is focused on active police duties. He noted they had discussed working with Ranlo residents and potentially partnering with other jurisdictions.

The Mayor asked about capacity for the program, and discussion indicated flexibility in numbers depending on interest and committee development.

Motion made by Commissioner Hill and seconded by Commissioner Locklear to instruct staff to start putting together the framework for establishing a public safety committee. Motion carried unanimously.

VI. Appointment of Ranlo Experience Members

The Mayor turned the discussion over to Commissioner Hill, explaining this was her vision for the committee. Commissioner Hill described the goal of making Ranlo as inviting as possible through events and activities beyond physical improvements. The committee would help organize events, work with the trail development, and support economic development efforts to make Ranlo more enjoyable for visitors and residents.

Town Manager Hansen provided procedural guidance on the appointment process, explaining that individual motions and votes were needed for each candidate, and that committees needed a minimum of four members to take action.

The following individuals were appointed to the Ranlo Experience Committee:

Drew Horine was noted for his experience in public communication, digital strategy, and community engagement, including chairing the Gastonia concert series. Motion made by Commissioner Laws and seconded by Commissioner Locklear to appoint Drew Horine to the Ranlo Experience Committee. Motion carried unanimously.

Zion McKenzie was recognized for expressing his passion for creating meaningful experiences that bring people together. Motion made by Commissioner Conner and seconded by Commissioner Hill to appoint Zion McKenzie to the Ranlo Experience Committee. Motion carried unanimously.

Amber Spicer was acknowledged for her active community involvement and desire to contribute to town events. Motion made by Commissioner Laws and seconded by Commissioner Hill to appoint Amber Spicer to the Ranlo Experience Committee. Motion carried unanimously.

Gewreka Robert was acknowledged for speaking during public comment with interest in being on the committee. Motion made by Commissioner Locklear and seconded by Commissioner Laws to appoint Gewreka Robert to the Ranlo Experience Committee.

Motion carried unanimously.

Later in the meeting, Wade Morton, a former commissioner, was also appointed to the committee. Motion made by Commissioner Locklear and seconded by Commissioner Laws to appoint Wade Morton to the Ranlo Experience Committee. Motion carried unanimously. During this Time Commissioner Hill made a motion to make Matthew Mays an Honorary Member of the Ranlo Experience Committee. Commissioner Locklear seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Hansen explained that committees could begin drafting agendas with four members, but noted there were still three positions available for the seven-member committee. He indicated that meetings would follow Robert's Rules of Order and require election of a chair, vice chair, and treasurer.

VII. Appointment of Planning Board Members

The Mayor explained the planning board's role in assisting Town of Ranlo officials with zoning requests, land use planning, and shaping the town's future. He provided examples of how the board would research and make recommendations on matters such as business zoning requests and potential impacts like data centers, helping commissioners make informed decisions.

Town Attorney explained the appointment structure: the board would appoint five members on staggered terms - two members for three-year terms, one member for a two-year term, and two members for one-year terms. The county board of commissioners would appoint two additional members from the ETJ (extraterritorial jurisdiction).

The following individuals were discussed and appointed:

Diana Palmer was noted for her previous experience serving on the planning board and involvement with town ordinances.

Mark Williams was recognized for his experience with commercial real estate portfolio management and service on the Gaston County Planning and Zoning Board.

Jessica Holtzapple was acknowledged for her geography degree with classes in urban planning and her vision for Ranlo's development.

Veda Williams was noted for her project planning experience and organizational skills.

Darryl Hayes (1804 Allegheny Dr), who was present at the meeting, provided extensive background about his 20 years with the New York City Police Department, military service, and community involvement including vice presidency of the New York City Guardians Association and community organizing work in Harlem. He explained his motivation for volunteering was based on his observation that little had changed in Ranlo during his seven to eight years of residence, and his desire to address community growth and housing availability issues.

For the three-year terms:

Motion made by Commissioner Laws and seconded by Commissioner Locklear to appoint Diana Palmer for a three-year term. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion made by Commissioner Laws and seconded by Commissioner Hill to appoint Mark Williams for a three-year term. Motion carried unanimously.

For the two-year term, there was noted interest for both Jessica Holtzapple and Darryl Hayes. After discussion:

Motion made by Commissioner Hill and seconded by Commissioner Laws to appoint Jessica Holtzapple for a two-year term. Motion carried unanimously.

For the one-year terms:

Motion made by Commissioner Locklear and seconded by Commissioner Hill to appoint Darryl Hayes for a one-year term. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion made by Commissioner Conner and seconded by Commissioner Hill to appoint Veda Williams for a one-year term. Motion carried unanimously.

VIII. Appointment of Ranlo Resource Network Members

The Mayor provided the definition of the Ranlo Resource Network Committee, explaining it helps connect Ranlo residents with programs and resources in the community, including healthcare information, mentoring opportunities, rent assistance, and other supportive services. He noted it was ideal for those passionate about social services, healthcare, and being good neighbors.

The following individuals were appointed to the seven-member committee:

Mariano Meneses (who goes by Mario) was noted for his trilingual abilities in Portuguese, Spanish, and English, which could help connect residents with services. Motion was made by Commissioner Hill and seconded by Commissioner Laws. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion made by Commissioner Hill and seconded by Commissioner Laws to appoint Markita McCormick, who expressed passion for connecting residents with critical resources and building community bridges. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion made by Commissioner Laws and seconded by Commissioner Locklear to appoint Karen Creech, who was noted for her experience with Gaston County Department of Social Services, health affairs, and mental health symposiums, with over 30 years of experience in this field. Motion carried unanimously.

Sherdinia Stepney was recognized for her 25 years in healthcare and community advocacy. Motion made Commissioner Hill and seconded by Commissioner Conner to appoint Sherdinia. Motion carried unanimously.

Aisha Wilison-Ellison addressed the board personally, sharing her background in social services and passion for providing resources to children and seniors in the community. Motion made by Commissioner Locklear and seconded by Commissioner Hill to appoint Aisha Wilison-Ellison. Motion carried unanimously.

Hansen reminded the board that like other committees, this one would need to elect officers and follow proper meeting procedures, and he would work with appointed members to establish meeting logistics.

IX. Discussion of Water Plant Uses

Town Manager Hansen led the discussion about potential uses for the 20-acre water plant property off GW Harvey behind the mountain. He explained that previous conversations among commissioners had explored various options beyond just selling to a subdivision, including the potential for creating what they termed a "Ranlo outpost" - a trail town concept.

Hansen described the property's unique location near both the mountain and river, and its proximity to the Carolina Thread Trail. He explained that the next phase of the thread trail would go through the property, creating opportunities for recreational development including restaurants, an amphitheater by the water, kayak rentals, and other amenities similar to the Whitewater Center concept.

Commissioner Hill supported the concept, envisioning a greenway with trails, bike rentals, a visitor center with information about Ranlo, and natural amenities like trees, bushes, flowers, and seating areas.

Darryl Hayes asked whether the town always had to sell property rather than lease it, arguing that leasing would maintain town control while still generating revenue and preserving future development options. He expressed concern about losing control once property is sold.

Mark Williams raised important questions about environmental remediation requirements for the former water plant site, including potential EPA testing for chemicals and associated costs.

Hansen acknowledged that no environmental studies had been conducted yet, and that remediation costs would need to be considered in any development plans. He emphasized the discussion was meant to explore all potential uses for the valuable waterfront property rather than immediately pursuing sale to a data center or subdivision.

The Mayor noted that any development would require significant funding and questioned where such money would come from, expressing concerns about feasibility.

After discussion about the various possibilities and complexities involved it was agreed amongst the board to table the discussion and send it to the planning board for further study and recommendations.

X. Discussion of Sidewalk Project to meet Carolina Thread Trail

Town Manager Hansen presented information about connecting Ranlo to the Carolina Thread Trail through sidewalk construction. He explained that the town has received \$722,690 in state grant funding for sidewalk rehabilitation on Spencer Mountain Road, which will extend existing sidewalks from the current endpoint Burmill to the Lodge.

Hansen described the potential to extend sidewalks further from the Lodge to connect with the thread trail, noting that the town could create a parking area and trailhead for residents to access the trail system. He explained that long-term, once the municipal complex is built with walking trails, the entire system would be connected.

The preliminary cost estimate for extending the sidewalk to connect with the thread trail would be approximately \$100,000 in administration costs plus \$642,000 in construction costs, totaling around \$750,000.

Hansen outlined several funding options, including budgeting for the project over multiple phases, applying for Community Project Funding through Congressman Tim Moore's office, or working with state and federal delegates who were supportive during the thread trail groundbreaking ceremony.

The Mayor supported pursuing grant funding as the first option and requested Hansen set up a meeting with Congressman Moore's representative to explore federal funding opportunities.

Commissioner Hill expressed support for moving forward with grant applications and exploring partnerships with various levels of government to secure funding for the connectivity project.

Hansen confirmed he would submit the project for consideration for Community Project Funding and continue working with state and federal representatives, noting that many delegates were involved in the thread trail project which could improve funding prospects.

Other Business:

XI. Comments from the Mayor

The Mayor expressed satisfaction with the meeting outcomes and the group of people involved. He described feeling "God's hand on this town" and appreciated the mutual respect among commissioners. He praised the current team including the Town Manager, Police Chief, Public Works staff, and Attorney for keeping the board on track.

The Mayor stated his excitement about what would happen by the end of the year, particularly looking forward to the town hall construction and road improvements beginning.

XII. Comments from the Board

Commissioner Connor expressed excitement about the level of interest in Ranlo's committees, stating she would prefer to have unlimited participation rather than restricting committee sizes. She welcomed all the suggestions and ideas shared, specifically mentioning continued interest in Jessica Holtzapple's garden concept for Ranlo.

She also raised concerns about ongoing issues that had been discussed for 12-14 years during her board service, particularly water line problems in Redland and residents who still lack fire hydrants. Commissioner Connor emphasized the importance of addressing these long-standing issues alongside new initiatives.

The Mayor noted that commissioners should be assigned to work with each committee and suggested discussing this arrangement at the next meeting. He clarified that while the committees are independent appointed bodies with their own authority, having commissioner liaisons would be beneficial.

XIII. Adjournment

Commissioner Hill made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Locklear seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously

ATTESTED TO:

Mayor Corey Creech