



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 1, 2025

CONTACT:

Joe Turner, CEO

(316) 880-9886

joe@aame.org

SBI Asked to Investigate Potential Criminal Violations of State Open Meeting and Open Record Laws by Summerfield Town Council

WICHITA, Kansas – On Friday, the American Association of Municipal Executives sent a letter to NCSBI Director Roger “Chip” Hawley requesting an investigation into potential criminal violations of various state laws pertaining to open meetings and public records.

That letter has been attached to this press release.

The American Association of Municipal Executives is a newly formed professional organization that advocates on behalf of city managers and other public sector executives. It was founded by Joe Turner and other public sector leaders. Turner is also the host of the City Manager Unfiltered podcast – widely regarded as the most influential local government podcast in the nation.



January 31, 2025

SENT VIA EMAIL

Honorable R.E. "Chip" Hawley
Director
North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation

RE: Summerfield City Council – Potential Criminal Violations of State Open Meetings and Open Records Laws

Dear Director Hawley:

We respectfully request that your agency investigate members of the Summerfield town council and current town manager Charles "Twig" Rollins for potential criminal violations of the state's Open Meetings and Open Records laws.

Based on public statements made by members of the council and confidential sources we have reason to believe that an orchestrated smear campaign is being waged against the former town manager and former employees who resigned en masse.

Potential violations include:

- Failure to properly notice January 14, 2025, council meeting
- Failure to properly notice official meeting(s) illegally conducted through simultaneous communications either in person or through electronic communication devices (e.g., phone calls, text messaging, email, or social media apps) before the January 14th meeting.
- Modification of or tampering with public and/or closed session meeting minutes by threat or harassment of town clerk(s)

Potential Violation #1: January 14 Meeting

At the January 14th meeting, residents of Summerfield and multiple members of the town council were blindsided when former North Carolina state auditor Beth Wood presented preliminary findings of an "investigation" she had conducted into alleged violations committed by former employees.

Mayor Tim Sessoms and Councilman John Doggett have publicly stated that they were unaware of any investigation and had no clue that this matter would be addressed at the council meeting.¹

Additionally, at least one media outlet, the Rhino Times, has stated that they were tipped off to this presentation:

The Rhino Times was not given a copy of Wood's report beforehand; however, about a week prior to the meeting, the Rhino was made aware the accusations would be made by Wood.²

When you examine the publicly available agenda and backup packet, you will find that the agenda item description for Item 11.A. was written deliberately to conceal the intent and purpose of the item.³

Conveniently, no background materials were included in the packet provided to the governing body or the public for Item 11.A.

The purpose of the State Open Meetings law is to ensure citizens are properly noticed as to the time and place of the meetings AND informed of the substantive content and purpose of the items to be discussed so they can effectively participate.

Potential Violation #2: Meeting(s) Illegally Conducted Through Simultaneous Communications

As stated above, Sessoms and Doggett were cut out of the process. There is no record of any discussion, authorization, or appropriation of any funds by this governing body to commence an investigation into the former employees.

It is inconceivable to think that a new town manager hired in October by the prior council, which changed dramatically in the November election, would act upon his own accord and commence an investigation of this scope and magnitude without consulting members of the governing body.

It appears from our vantage point that multiple members of the governing body and the town manager conspired to break the law to advance their political agenda.

We call upon your office to interview these individuals, review their personal and professional electronic devices, email, and social media apps to determine whether the law was broken.

We are hard pressed to believe they communicated telepathically or used carrier pigeons to coordinate this political stunt.

¹ <https://www.nwobserver.com/articles/featured-stories/former-town-staff-mayor-decry-false-allegations/>

² <https://www.rhinotimes.com/news/former-summerfield-staff-strike-back-with-full-force-on-allegations/>

³ [https://www.summerfieldnc.gov/vertical/sites/%7BC25D1811-CF89-415D-A5B8-0412F39A34CB%7D/uploads/TC_2025-01-14_Meeting_Packet_\(To_Post\).pdf](https://www.summerfieldnc.gov/vertical/sites/%7BC25D1811-CF89-415D-A5B8-0412F39A34CB%7D/uploads/TC_2025-01-14_Meeting_Packet_(To_Post).pdf)

Potential Violation #3: Tampering with Public Records

Based on information we have received from source(s), it is our understanding that the current and/or former clerk(s) may have been pressured by member(s) of the governing body to alter the minutes of public and/or closed sessions.

Anecdotally, media reports inform us that the current town clerk is serving out a resignation notice period and leaving to take a job that will result in a 50 percent pay cut.⁴

Investigate the Investigators

Elected officials have tremendous power and seemingly endless means and resources to retaliate and persecute individuals. The average person, especially a government employee, does not possess the financial resources to utilize the justice system as a check against this power.

We are not asking you to investigate a technical violation as a result of human error, honest mistakes, or sincere misunderstanding of the law. We are asking you to investigate what appears to be calculated, premeditated violations with the express intent of smearing the reputations of these employees and harming their ability to acquire gainful employment.

Everything this Council has done has been designed to hide their true intent, deny these employees their right to due process, and prevent their citizens from being informed and engaged.

I urge you to act expeditiously on this matter. If you have any questions, you may call me at (316) 880-9886 or email me at: joe@aame.org.

Sincerely,

Joe Turner
Chief Executive Officer
American Association of Municipal Executives

⁴ <https://www.nwobserver.com/articles/featured-stories/summerfields-clerk-resigns-after-one-month/>