



**OAK RIDGE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
MAY 6, 2021 - 7:00 P.M.
OAK RIDGE TOWN HALL**

MINUTES

Members Present

Ann Schneider, Mayor
Jim Kinneman, Mayor Pro Tem
George McClellan
Doug Nodine
Martha Pittman

Staff Present

Bill Bruce, Town Manager
Sandra Smith, Town Clerk
Sean Taylor, Planning Director
Sam Anders, Finance Officer
Michael Thomas, Town Attorney

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Ann Schneider called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

A. Invocation/Moment of Silence.

Sebastian King offered the invocation.

B. Pledge of Allegiance.

Boy Scout Ethan Hartman led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. MAYOR'S STATEMENT CONCERNING THE EMERGENCY

Mayor Schneider read from a prepared statement, explaining that the meeting was being conducted in person as a result of a consensus of Council members. She said that Council members and staff had been fully vaccinated and would not be wearing masks during the meeting as allowed by the current Governor's Orders. She asked that members of the public who were unvaccinated wear their masks during the meeting even when speaking. Mayor Schneider said the public had been invited to join either in person or by viewing the livestream, and instructions had been widely publicized. Schneider said agendas were available in the meeting room, and agendas and meeting materials had been posted on the Town website. She said the Town is meeting all statutory requirements while complying with the Governor's Emergency Order. Mayor Schneider asked Council members to speak up at any time if they could not hear what was being said so that adjustments could be made as soon as possible.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

Mayor Pro Tem Jim Kinneman made a motion to approve the agenda, and Councilwoman Martha Pittman seconded. Via a roll-call vote, the motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

4. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

Councilman George McClellan moved that the April 1, 2021, regular meeting minutes be approved, and Councilwoman Martha Pittman seconded. Via roll-call vote, the motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

5. RESOLUTIONS, PROCLAMATIONS, ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mayor Schneider read a proclamation recognizing Eagle Scout Stewart Chipman, which is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes.

6. REPORT FROM GUILFORD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Lieutenant Triche of the District 1 office of the Guilford County Sheriff's Office reported 56 calls for service in Oak Ridge in April. Of those, he said one was an automobile theft and three were larcenies. Lt. Triche reported that catalytic converters were being stolen and sold for scrap metal from parked vehicles such as church buses and trucks. He encouraged residents to keep a close eye on their vehicles, and to contact 911 concerning any suspicious activity.

Councilman McClellan said that many residents who live in the Historic District had concerns regarding excessively loud vehicles, and Lt. Triche said that this issue had been discussed by Captain Darryl Loftis. He asked residents to try to specify which vehicles were being loud and to try to get vehicle plate numbers. He said that repeat offenders could be cited for violating the noise ordinance.

Mayor Schneider said that it would be hard for individuals to get vehicle plate numbers. She said that many of these loud vehicles were also speeding.

Councilman McClellan said that residents had reported issues with speeding on Peebles Road as well.

Lt. Triche said that they are patrolling these areas and were trying to establish more visibility. He said that if a loud muffler noise is being made by a vehicle, it is more difficult to enforce than vehicles playing loud music.

7. REPORT FROM OAK RIDGE FIRE DEPARTMENT

Chief Ken Gibson reported that the department had received 49 calls in April, which he said were mainly medical calls. Gibson said paid and volunteer department members received 901 hours of training in the previous month. The safety message for the month was for residents cleaning out ashes from outdoor fire pits or burning brush to put the ashes into a bucket and then fill it with water. Gibson said that it only takes one ember and a little breeze to ignite a fire.

8. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

A. Consideration/Approval of reappointment of Jason Streck to Planning & Zoning Board.

Councilman George McClellan moved to approve the reappointment of Jason Streck to the Planning & Zoning Board, and Councilwoman Pittman seconded. Via roll-call vote, the motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

B. Consideration/Approval of appointment of Pat Fiorentino from alternate to full Planning & Zoning Board member.

Councilman George McClellan moved to approve the appointment of Pat Fiorentino from alternate to full Planning & Zoning Board member and Councilwoman Pittman seconded. Via roll-call vote, the motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Consideration/Approval of new park name.

Mayor Schneider said that the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board had presented name recommendations for the new park at the April Council meeting.

Councilwoman Martha Pittman made a motion to approve the name of Heritage Farm Park for the new park, and Mayor Pro Tem Jim Kinneman seconded the motion. Via a roll-call vote, the motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

B. Presentation of 2021-2022 Fiscal Year Budget.

John Jenkins, chair of the Finance Committee, explained that the Finance Committee held three meetings to review this year's budget, next year's budget and the planned capital expenditures. He said that there were good questions asked and answered, that it was a good budget and that it represented fiscal conservatism.

Jim Harton said that he was one the newer members of the Finance Committee. He said that the process was well-honed and interesting. Harton said that Town Manager Bill Bruce was well prepared, and that committee members did not challenge every line item but did question ones that were important. He said that he felt like the budget was a good recommendation, and that it followed the Strategic Plan. Harton said that he was impressed with the budget process.

Stuart Mease, another new member of the Finance Committee, thanked the committee members. He said that he was relatively new to the area and had previously served in town roles as a volunteer. Mease said that he was impressed with how the Town planned and that one of the crown jewels of Oak Ridge is the park, which he said was a tremendous investment for young people. Mease said that Oak Ridge was a wonderful place to live, had a low tax rate and was a very affordable place to live.

Town Manager Bill Bruce thanked the Finance Committee and said that the budget recommendation was included in their packet. He said that the budget was developed over several months and included many Council-led initiatives. Bruce said that last year was a challenging year, but that revenue remained healthy and property tax collection had been strong. He said that the Town would end the current fiscal year \$200,000 over budget and \$100,000 under expenses. Bruce said that the proposed budget would hold projected revenues and that the operating expenses would go up .5 percent or \$7,000. Bruce said that \$855,000 has been budgeted for development and construction at the new park property. He said that the Town has again applied for a \$450,000 NC Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) grant which would be used to help defray costs for this investment. He said that the budget included a \$250,000 debt service payment on the Whitaker property. Bruce said that the proposed budget would be posted on the Town's website for review and comment. He announced that a public hearing regarding the budget would be held during the Council meeting on June 3.

Council discussion:

Councilman McClellan said that the budget was outstanding, conservative and did not raise taxes. He said that it does propose raises for staff and Council. He noted that Council members had not had a raise in the monthly stipend in 15 years.

Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman thanked Finance Committee members for their excellent work on the budget. He said that the proposed budget made a big park commitment even if the PARTF grant was not received. Kinneman said that he did not agree with the stipend increase for Council members because he did not see a need for a raise. He said at the June Council meeting that he would suggest an amendment to the budget to remove the increase.

Councilman Nodine said that the only issue that he had with the proposed budget was the stipend increase to Council members. He said that due to the pandemic, many people had a tough time, and the idea of Council members receiving a raise now was terrible. Nodine said that he would vote against the budget unless the raise for Council was removed.

Councilwoman Pittman said that she was the Council liaison to the Finance Committee this year. She said that she looked forward to hearing comments from residents as it related to the proposed budget.

Mayor Schneider said that it takes a couple of months for Town Manager Bruce to prepare the budget in collaboration with committee chairs, Finance Officer Sam Anders and the Finance Committee. She said that on citizens' tax bills, Town taxes represent less than 9 percent, and when combined with the Fire Department, that tax is less than 20 percent. She said that the other 80 percent goes to Guilford County. Schneider said that the stipend increase represented less than .2 percent of the budget, which is a tiny amount. She said that Council had not had an increase in 15 years and that despite the tough year, optimism was the order of the day. Schneider encouraged residents to review the budget and to let Council members know if they had any questions.

C. Consideration/approval of Annual Financial Audit Contract.

Finance Officer Sam Anders said that the Town is required to have an annual financial fiscal audit. He said that the contract from the firm of Dixon Hughes Goodman had been reviewed by Town Manager Bruce, Town Attorney Michael Thomas, the NC Treasury Department and by him. Anders recommended accepting the annual financial audit contract.

Councilman George McClellan made a motion to approve the annual financial audit contract, and Mayor Pro Tem Jim Kinneman seconded.

Council discussion:

Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman asked if there was any concern regarding using the same company for several years, and Anders responded that he did not think so.

Anders said that all CPA firms had pretty much the same procedures and that Dixon Hughes Goodman rotated their employees that perform audits. He said that the large firms often want at least a 3-year commitment. Anders said that he liked using a second-tier firm.

Via roll call vote, the motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

D. Consideration/approval of Resolution R-2021-04 Opposing SB 349/HB 401 & HB 496.

Mayor Schneider asked Councilwoman Pittman to read Resolution R-2021-04, which is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes.

Councilman Doug Nodine made a motion to approve Resolution R-2021-04 Opposing SB 39/HB 401 & HB 496, and Councilman George McClellan seconded.

Council comments:

Councilman McClellan said that there were three Republicans and one Democrat supporting this bill. McClellan said that he believed that if this bill passed that it would create chaos in Land Use Plans and undermine the Town of Oak Ridge's citizen-led Land Use Plan. He encouraged residents to email or call lawmakers of both political parties to voice concern regarding this proposed legislation.

Councilwoman Pittman said that these proposed bills not only affect our ordinances, but would effectively silence the voices of our citizens, of the Planning & Zoning Board and Council.

Mayor Schneider said that both bills run counter to democratic processes. She said that she believed that if we spoke up together that these bills would be defeated.

Via roll call vote, the motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

E. Consideration/approval of water for fire protection scope of work.

Bruce said that one element of the Town's adopted Scope of Work for the \$1.1 million state water grant is to explore the feasibility of a fire suppression system. He said that the Water Committee had met with Fire Chief Gibson to discuss how to accomplish this goal. Bruce said that Committee modeled the proposed scope of work after a similar study performed for the Town of Summerfield by the Wooten

Company for insight and guidance in this process. He said that the Committee had asked the consultant to review several options, which Bruce told Council were included in their packets.

Councilman George McClellan made a motion to approve the proposed scope of work for a water for fire protection study, and Mayor Pro Tem Jim Kinneman seconded.

Councilman McClellan asked what the timeframe was for this work, and Bruce responded that it would hopefully take two to three months. McClellan said that there was a time limit on the \$1.1 million reimbursement money unless the legislature approved a 1-year extension. He said that the Town could also potentially use funds from the American Rescue Plan. McClellan said that he was seeing fewer ponds that are used by the fire department as water sources and that this project would be a great boost to public safety.

Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman said that it was important to look at leveraging this money for fire suppression. He said that the number of houses in Oak Ridge had increased while the number of ponds had decreased. Kinneman said that the scope of work would be research and that no decisions had been made to do anything.

Councilman Nodine said that he was an opponent of the municipal water system, but saw the value of a fire suppression system.

Councilwoman Pittman said that she fully supported researching this topic.

Mayor Schneider said that Fire Chief Gibson and the fire marshal were involved in this process. She said that this study could be a game changer regarding water access for our fire department and could possibly also provide infrastructure for future water development in Oak Ridge.

Via roll call vote, the motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

10. MONTHLY FINANCIAL UPDATE

Finance Officer Sam Anders said that this was a fairly normal time of the year as it related to the budget, which is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes. He requested a budget amendment for budgeted expenditures for up to \$4,574 which included \$449 for life insurance rates, \$500 for office supplies, \$500 for advertising, \$3,000 for dues and subscriptions, and \$125 for liability insurance. He said that the total amount would be taken out of the fund balance.

Councilwoman Martha Pittman made a motion to approve the budget amendment for up to \$4,574 as presented by the Finance Officer, and Mayor Pro Tem Jim Kinneman seconded the motion. Via a roll call vote, it was passed unanimously (5-0).

Councilman George McClellan made a motion to approve the financial report as submitted by the Finance Officer, and Councilwoman Martha Pittman seconded the motion. Via a roll call vote, it was passed unanimously (5-0).

11. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ron Simpson, 8022 Fogleman Road, commended Council for approving the Resolution opposing legislation from the General Assembly. He said that he did not know if he had ever seen more malicious legislation than these proposed bills. Simpson said that he was a veteran member of the Planning & Zoning Board and its past chair. Simpson said that the purpose of the Planning & Zoning Board was to bring order where there might otherwise be chaos. He said that he and his wife had written emails to legislators about this unwarranted interference with local government control.

Miles Foy, 2328 Oak Ridge Road, said that he lived across the street from Oak Ridge Military Academy and was very concerned about the noise that is being created by traffic on NC 150/68. He stated that the noise had increased significantly over the past year. He asked Council for its support in helping to make traffic flow calmer and quieter. Foy also encouraged Council to consult with the NCDOT about possibly extending the length of the 25-mph school zone on NC 150 eastward in front of the academy to include the athletic fields on the north side of the school's campus. He also suggested extending the hours of use for the speed zone to better reflect the current ending of the school's activities.

Major Robert Forde of the Oak Ridge Military Academy agreed with Foy regarding the loud traffic noises in front of the school and his suggestion of extending the 25-mph zone in length and time. He said that cadets do not finish their day until 7 p.m. and he would be glad to provide whatever assistance the Town needed in making proposed changes.

Myra Blackburn, 2345 Oak Ridge Road, agreed with what others had said regarding the noise. She said that the traffic noise wakes her up at 6:30 a.m. every morning and that the speed of vehicles is unbelievable. She thanked Council for what they are doing at the new park including the veterans memorial. Blackburn said that she grew up in the little, white house on the property where the memorial is planned. She said that her father was a WWII veteran and that his dog tags were recently found on the property by a metal detecting group.

Sebastian King, 3213 Stoneberg Court, Greensboro, applauded Council for standing up to the legislature. He said that he had been a policy advisor in the NC General Assembly in the past and had seen some good laws and some really bad laws. He said the proposed legislation would completely undermine local government. King said that he would work hard to defeat bills like this going forward.

12. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Historic Preservation Commission

Town Clerk Sandra Smith read the report, which is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes.

B. Planning & Zoning Board.

Smith read the report, which is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes.

C. Mountains-to-Sea Trail.

Smith read the report, which is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes.

D. Conservation Easement Committee.

No meeting

E. Special Events Committee.

Chair Patti Dmuchowski reported that the committee had decided that the new name for the veterans site would be Veterans Honor Green. She said the name recognized veterans living and deceased as well as the green farmland on which it will be located. She said that the committee had finalized fundraising pamphlets which highlight Council matching funds raised up to \$68,000. Dmuchowski announced that the committee would be hosting a Memorial Day event at the amphitheater on Monday, May 31, at 10:00 a.m.

F. Parks & Recreation Advisory Board

Co-Chair John Browning reported that the Board had approved two requests for events by Oak Ridge Elementary School. He said that the Music in the Park event scheduled for April 10 had been canceled due to inclement weather and that the next event would be held on May 8, 6:30-8:00 p.m. Browning said that two bands, The Tyler Millard Band and Barefoot Modern, would perform at the July 10 event.

G. Finance Committee.

Chair John Jenkins praised the contributions of fellow committee members and Town staff in preparing the proposed budget for the next fiscal year. He said that the committee would meet again on May 10.

13. COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION REPORTS

A. Oak Ridge Military Academy.

Major Robert Forde, ORMA Director of Admissions, reported that the academy had enrolled a total of 113 students this academic year, and it anticipated enrolling well over 100 students for the next school year. Forde said re-enrollment is at more than 70 percent. He said that the academy plans to graduate 11 seniors, all of whom have been accepted by at least one of their three top choices for college. Forde said that since August, 145 families had visited the school. He said that during the pandemic, unlike other schools, the academy's enrollment increased and continues to grow. He said that the school needs to survive and that it is a big part of Oak Ridge.

B. Oak Ridge Elementary School.

Smith read a report from Penny Loschin, school principal, which is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes.

C. **Oak Ridge Youth Association.**

No report.

14. COUNCIL COMMENTS

15. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Jim Kinneman made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 p.m. and Councilwoman Martha Pittman seconded the motion. Via a roll call vote, it was passed unanimously (5-0).

