



**OAK RIDGE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
JANUARY 9, 2025 - 7:00 P.M.
OAK RIDGE TOWN HALL**

MINUTES

Members Present

Jim Kinneman, Mayor
Mike Stone, Mayor Pro Tem
Ann Schneider
Michael Greeson
Jim Harton

Staff Present

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

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Jim Kinneman called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

A. Invocation

Greg Leimone paid tribute to fallen Greensboro Police Department officers Horan and Nix and offered the invocation.

B. Pledge of Allegiance

Student ambassadors from Northwest Middle School led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Councilwoman Ann Schneider made a motion to approve the agenda and Councilman Michael Greeson seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Councilwoman Ann Schneider made a motion to approve the minutes of the December 5, 2024, regular meeting and the December 5, 2024, Special Called meeting. Councilman Jim Harton seconded, and the motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

4. RESOLUTIONS, PROCLAMATIONS, ANNOUNCEMENTS

Proclamation recognizing Patti Stokes and the Northwest Observer

Kinneman read the proclamation, which is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes. Each Council member followed with comments expressing their appreciation of Patti Stokes and the Northwest Observer publication, and Patti Stokes offered comments in acknowledgement.

5. REPORT FROM GUILFORD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

No report

6. REPORT FROM OAK RIDGE FIRE DEPARTMENT

Assistant Fire Chief Sam Anders reported on call statistics for 2024. He offered advice on how to safely manage the predicted winter storm weather.

7. PUBLIC COMMENTS/COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION REPORTS

Northwest Middle School student ambassadors Chaz Royal, 5004 Hunters Path Court, Greensboro; Josilyn Menser, 5542 Autumn Harvest Drive, Kernersville; and Aditi Thondapu, 7445 Joseph Creek Lane, Greensboro, reported on their efforts to support the recovery of Ashe County Middle School from damage sustained during Hurricane Helene. The students indicated that a total of 978 school supply items had been collected and distributed to the school.

Phillip Southern, 6409 Hollow Road, introduced himself as the incoming president of Oak Ridge Youth Association (ORYA). He acknowledged with appreciation the partnership the organization had maintained with the Town to produce and manage a youth athletic program offering nine organized sports operated by hundreds of volunteers.

Ben Walraven, 5931 Pepper Road, asked Council to consider the potential loss of volunteers if recording of committee meetings is mandated.

8. OLD BUSINESS

A. Consideration/Approval of Facility Fee Schedule and Farmhouse Community Center Policy

Councilman Jim Harton made a motion to approve the revised policy upon condition that reviews of the usage data are conducted six months and 12 months after the Farmhouse's opening. Councilman Michael Greeson seconded the motion.

Councilman Harton pointed out that the MyRec reservation system would enable efficient reporting of usage data.

Councilwoman Schneider expressed concern that approving a generous rental discount for senior residents took three months to consider, during which the

timeframe for use of the discount had been reduced from 32 to 18 hours in a week. She pointed out that use of the Farmhouse was available to seniors as well as to all other renters and that adjustments to the policy could be made at any time. She expressed concern at the apparent struggle to be more generous to senior residents.

Mayor Kinneman said that Schneider's implication that Council did not want to be generous to the Town's seniors was unfair. He stated that Council had instead wanted to review the policy more closely.

The motion passed unanimously (5-0).

B. Consideration/Approval of request to record all committee and public meetings conducted by the Town

Kinneman noted that Councilman Michael Greeson had requested the consideration to record committee meetings be included in the meeting's agenda.

Greeson expressed his belief that recordings of meetings would eventually occur, and that people should have the opportunity to listen to meetings if they cannot attend them. He stated that he did not intend to discourage participation in committees by supporting the recording of their meetings. He stated that he realized that a majority of three or more votes would be required for approval.

Stone referred to state law, which clearly asserts that a public body must maintain full and accurate minutes of sessions so that those who cannot attend the meeting can have a reasonable understanding of matters that have transpired during that meeting. He added that recordings may be in written, audio, or video form, and took note that a vote of three or more would be required to approve the consideration. Stone stated that directing citizens to reach out to committee members for information from their meetings was a retrogressive approach. He stated that some Town committees are not complying with this state law.

Harton stated no opposition to recording elected officials in meetings but said he believed that written minutes were sufficient for meetings of volunteer committees. He stated that recordings would disrupt the unrestricted flow of ideas in meetings, and he saw no need for recordings beyond the expected written minutes.

Schneider deemed the recording of committee meetings a bad idea, which nearly every active committee had opposed and no citizen had requested. She clarified that minutes comprised recordings of actions taken during a meeting and were not a transcript of every spoken word. She stressed that Council's focus should be on engaging more with its citizens rather than on adding new strictures to meeting formats.

Kinneman expressed that recordings were not intended to be punitive or limiting, but could instead be a tool to foster trust through transparency. He believed that the opportunity to watch government in action would foster broader civic engagement. He stressed that many individuals face challenges in attending meetings and that recordings would enable them to experience meaningful inclusivity and would

demonstrate Council's commitment to serving the entire community. He encouraged committees to voluntarily begin video streaming their meetings.

Mayor Pro Tem Mike Stone made a motion that effective January 13, 2025, all committee and public meetings conducted by the Town be audio recorded or livestreamed if they are not currently recorded. He added that committees currently not recording meetings may opt to be audio recorded or livestreamed. Councilman Michael Greeson seconded the motion.

Schneider repeated her conviction that the move to record meetings was a bad idea.

The motion failed by a 2-3 vote with Mayor Pro Tem Mike Stone and Councilman Michael Greeson voting for the motion.

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Consideration/Approval of 6-month extension of 2024-25 Parks Usage Agreement with Oak Ridge Youth Association

Kinneman explained that a request had been presented to extend the 2024-25 Parks Usage Agreement by six months and that efforts to explore alternative approaches to field usage were underway.

Town Manager Bill Bruce explained that Oak Ridge Youth Association (ORYA) had made the request to increase its spring 2025 stipend to \$19,000 to the Parks & Recreation (P&R) Advisory Board based on a financial analysis conducted by ORYA. He added that the P&R Advisory Board recommended approval of the request.

Harton questioned the legitimacy of the contract being reviewed as it contained no language regarding the increased stipend. Kinneman explained that the contract was valid and that it was being considered along with the request to modify the stipend. Harton inquired about the rationale behind the request. P&R Advisory Board Chair Adrian Eckenrod responded that ORYA made the request to assist with the organization's financial obligations during the transition of key roles in the ORYA organization. He added that while financial details were unclear, the Board sought to approve the request with the stipulation that the increased stipend would be drawn from the annual \$30,000 stipend and that the extension of the agreement was temporary. Harton stressed the need for data to substantiate the increase in stipend and noted that he would support the contract as it was without the increase in stipend.

Greeson pointed out that the intent to request the increase in stipend was made known to him during a previous meeting and he saw no reason not to proceed with its approval. Harton indicated that Council members had been tasked with exploring alternative field usage approaches at the meeting referred to by Greeson, without the premise that the ORYA Usage Agreement would be renewed past its current term. Stone agreed that the request had been disclosed prior to the current discussion and intimated that inflation, increased supply costs, and growth in the ORYA program accounted for the requested increased stipend allowance. He reiterated Greeson's desire to move forward with an approval of the request.

Kinneman added that only cursory discussion of the stipend had taken place prior to this meeting, but that he was inclined to proceed with approving the request. Schneider pointed out that the Town had happily committed \$30,000 annually to ORYA over the past five years to support its partnership with ORYA and that she was inclined to support an accelerated payment schedule to assist with the organization's current financial challenges.

Councilwoman Ann Schneider made a motion to approve the six-month extension of the 2024-25 Parks Usage Agreement with ORYA and to change the six-month stipend from \$15,000 to \$19,000. Councilman Michael Greeson seconded the motion, and the motion passed 4-1, with Councilman Jim Harton voting against.

B. Consideration/Approval of directing staff to find a firm to design Heritage Farm Park Phase 2

Harton asked to clarify details of Phase 2. Kinneman explained that Phase 2 of Heritage Farm Park (HFP) entailed consideration of a solution regarding sports courts and small shelters. He stressed the importance of developing a plan that would meet Oak Ridge design standards and meet eligibility qualifications for optional grant funding.

Greeson emphasized his full support behind advancing Phase 2.

Stone emphasized his belief about the urgency to advance Phase 2 to address citizens' concerns for enhancing park facilities. He pointed out that a suitable design had already been obtained from McGill Associates which could accommodate two tennis courts, eight pickleball courts, and one basketball court. He suggested that a design/build plan would expedite the development process.

Harton stated his willingness to consider moving up the construction of sports courts from the six-year projection designated by the previous year's Capital Improvement Plan, provided that the development plans included opportunities to seek grant funding. Optionally, he suggested financing the project if suitable interest rates were available.

While she said advancing the project was desirable, Schneider indicated that the Town does not have funds to support it. She pointed to the \$8 million investment in Heritage Farm Park, and the annual \$300,000 payment schedule on a \$3 million loan at 3.94 percent interest, which the Town currently carried. She cautioned against assuming further debt before realizing the full cost of the water main project along with several other incomplete projects presently undertaken by the Town. She recommended directing staff to examine qualification criteria for grant funding and stressed the need to seek community, P&R Advisory Board, and Finance Committee input on Phase 2. Schneider stressed the need for thoughtful, data-driven consideration of the project.

Kinneman echoed Schneider's concerns, adding his belief that a design/build approach compatible with PARTF eligibility criteria and other grant sources could be undertaken. He brought up several questions regarding the scope of the project that required careful study and stated goals. He commented that the process would

be deliberate and would take time. Kinneman prioritized identifying funding sources before proceeding with the design/build of Phase 2.

Greeson asked if Phase 2 of the Veterans Honor Green had been funded. Town Manager Bill Bruce replied that money was in the budget for that item. Greeson pointed out the irrelevancy of including that project in with the present discussion of sports courts solutions. Schneider noted that though the funding existed for the Veterans Honor Green project, it had not yet been bid out. Greeson re-emphasized his support for pushing forward the HFP Phase 2 project, pointing out that it had already been 16 years since the initial consideration for tennis courts had been made.

Schneider asked Bruce if solicitation of multiple bids was required. Bruce replied that the RFQ (Request for Qualifications) process would be required to solicit a design/build plan, but that project costs below \$50,000 were exempt from the RFQ process. He noted that the Town typically pursued more than one bid on a project. Greeson noted his support for multiple bid reviews.

Stone described in detail the design specifications for sports courts, indicating that according to his research, the estimated cost was approximately \$220,000 per sport court, the total cost for pickleball, tennis, and basketball courts would be less than \$750,000. He described positive feedback sought from adjoining towns who maintain pickleball courts. Stone pointed out that the Town annually reserved half a million dollars for a rainy-day fund and spent over \$800,000 on the Redmon House (Farmhouse Community Center) project, which was more than the estimated cost for sports courts. He emphasized the project would be delayed to summer 2026 if grant funding were pursued.

Schneider reminded Council that the Redmon House (Farmhouse) project received \$380,000 in grant funding and stated her favor of seeking assistance from grants. She stated that the sports courts project had been extended in the Capital Improvement Plan due to other existing projects which placed burdens on the Town's finances as well as on staff time to manage. Kinneman added that many relevant factors of the project remained to be studied, one being the noise factor of the game, which can trigger sensory challenged children in the adjacent ADA-compliant playground. He stressed the value of obtaining a design that would be compliant with grant requirements so they could be considered as an optional funding source. He indicated that real costs for the project had to be considered over anecdotal data on costs, along with the financial impacts made by remaining unexamined factors in the project.

Greeson asked if the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) grant was a state or federally funded grant and what the likelihood of receiving state funding would be in light of the extent of damages sustained in western North Carolina. Kinneman explained that PARTF was a trust fund specific to parks and recreation and added that additional funding sources might be obtained from the County. Schneider added that receiving funding from legislators would be unlikely, but that other park trust funds and recreation grants were a possibility.

Stone referred back to the issue of noise on the pickleball court and asked if similar noise issues would be experienced from the tennis and basketball courts. Kinneman noted that noise from pickleball courts was of a different decibel. Greeson suggested relocating the courts to the original park. Kinneman agreed that the location of the courts could be another factor to study. Schneider commented that the scope of the project was not clear and asked Bruce what information he would need to direct staff to proceed with the project's consideration. Bruce replied that he needed clear directions from Council regarding the location of the courts, and whether to explore grant funding or suitable design firms first. He indicated that the plan Stone alluded to earlier in the discussion was not sufficiently detailed to bid out immediately. Bruce noted that a suitable design firm could advise on many of the undetermined details of the project such as noise issues and mixing of tennis with pickleball courts, but that would add to the scope of work by the firm.

Stone pressed for a timeframe on the project. Kinneman explained that the project was not urgent and that it required deliberate study, so it would be conceivable that it could take six to nine months before the project could be ready to bid. He stressed the necessity to put a studied plan together before undertaking funding issues. Greeson opined his projection that the earliest the project would be completed would be spring 2027 and made a motion to move forward with the design of Phase 2. Further discussion on the issues of grant funding proceeded. Stone commented that taxpayers should remember how long the process was taking and who was dragging their feet.

Councilman Michael Greeson made a motion to direct staff to begin the process of securing a firm to design Phase 2 of Heritage Farm Park and to direct the contractor to make the design grant eligible. Mayor Pro Tem Mike Stone seconded the motion.

Schneider pointed out that the \$500,000 annually added to the fund balance was accounted for in the Capital Improvement Plan budget and that it was slated as a funding source for future projects. She stressed that the reserve was not just "extra money." Stone pointed out that the sports courts solution was a future project.

The motion passed unanimously (5-0).

10. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

A. Update on elevated water tank

Bruce reported that a groundbreaking ceremony for the water tower was scheduled for January 23, 2025. He noted that the water tower would initially be filled with water from the well on the Heritage Farm Park property, and it would be used to serve the Oak Ridge Fire Department and to irrigate the athletic fields. He explained that the Water Advisory Committee was working on engineering plans for the water main that would connect the tower to the Winston-Salem water system. Bruce reported that construction was scheduled to begin in March and the water tank would be fabricated remotely in Kentucky during the spring to early summer months and erected on Town property in early fall.

Kinneman asked when construction time would begin its countdown. Bruce replied that the Notice to Proceed had been issued in January and the date of completion was issued as December 31, 2025. He added that collaboration with the contractor to plan construction access into the site was underway with hopes to maintain pedestrian access between Oak Ridge Town Park and Heritage Farm Park.

B. Any other business

Bruce pointed out that ensuring current and complete information in the meeting packets was his responsibility and that the lack of up-to-date information in the ORYA section of the packet was his shortcoming, which should not be attributed to the P&R Advisory Board.

11. MONTHLY FINANCIAL UPDATE

A. Finance Report

Finance Officer Sam Anders presented the financial report for the month of December 2024, which is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes.

B. Consideration/Approval of Audit Contract for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding

Anders described the audit contract, which is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes. He explained that he sought approval for \$4,500 to pay for the federally mandated ARPA compliance process and \$10,000 for administrative fees covering the additional capital project work during FY2023-24. He added that these funds had been preemptively budgeted.

Councilwoman Ann Schneider made a motion to approve the finance report as presented by the Finance Officer, along with the audit contract for ARPA compliance and the amended audit contract for FY 2023-24. Councilman Michael Greeson seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously (5-0).

12. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Historic Preservation Commission

No report

B. Planning & Zoning Board

No report

C. Mountains-to-Sea Trail Committee

No report

D. Conservation Easement Committee

No report

E. Special Events Committee

Chair Patti Dmuchowski reported on the success of Light Up the Night and noted that Phase 1 of the Veterans Honor Green project was nearing completion, with Phase 2 awaiting final construction documents.

F. Tree Board

Chair Austin Goldman reported on the Town's 2024 Tree City USA application, the committee's recommendation for the construction access to the water tower construction site, the Treasure Tree program, and issues on Town Park walkways created by River Birch tree root invasion. He added that long-time member Nancy Stoudemire had resigned her position on the committee, new member Allison Corado had been appointed, and that one open position remained on the committee.

G. Parks & Recreation Advisory Board

Co-Chair Adrian Eckenrod reported on events approved at the park, ORYA, Farmhouse Community Center, Music in the Park, and the new music events being planned for the Farmhouse Community Center. He also gave a construction update on the Town Park entrance project.

H. Finance Committee

Mayor Kinneman reported that the Finance Committee had not convened for its annual meetings, but would do so in March, and meetings are open to the public. He encouraged individuals to consider applying to the committee.

I. Water Advisory Committee

No report

13. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Phillip Southern, 6409 Hollow River Road, clarified that the request made for the ORYA stipend increase was based on projections of the program's growth, and he offered to forward details of the growth analysis studies that ORYA conducted to Council and the P&R Advisory Board to help explain the request for the increase.

14. COUNCIL COMMENTS

15. ADJOURNMENT

Councilman Michael Greeson made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:21 p.m., and Councilwoman Ann Schneider seconded. The motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Respectfully Submitted:

Sandra B. Smith, CMC, NCCMC
Asst. Town Manager/ Town Clerk

Jim A. Kinneman
Mayor