



**OAK RIDGE TOWN COUNCIL
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING/WORKSHOP
OCTOBER 20, 2022- 10:00 A.M.
OAK RIDGE TOWN HALL**

MINUTES

Members Present

Ann Schneider, Mayor
Jim Kinneman, Mayor Pro Tem
George McClellan
Martha Pittman
Spencer Sullivan

Staff Present

Bill Bruce, Town Manager
Sandra Smith, Town Clerk
Sean Taylor, Planning Director

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Ann Schneider called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m.

2. APPROVE AGENDA

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

3. DISCUSSION/ADOPTION OF UPDATE TO TOWN OF OAK RIDGE STRATEGIC PLAN

Mayor Schneider said that this would be a working session for Council to do big picture thinking about major areas of focus in the Strategic Plan. She said that if policies or more detailed issues were brought up that those items would need to be held off for further discussion. Schneider said that the Town was nearly through its 5-year period for the original Strategic Plan, and that staff was currently working with a full plate of projects. She said that new ideas would need to be considered carefully with staff capacity in mind.

Bruce asked Council members to refer to the current Strategic Plan's vision statement on page two. He said that he wanted a consensus from Council as to whether the vision statement was still accurate, and Council responded with a consensus vote that the vision statement was still good.

Bruce said that he would like to review the Strategic Plan from the beginning. He said that he would provide a brief update and then Council could discuss any issues if necessary.

Bruce asked Council to consider the following with updating the strategic plan:

- What are we doing well?

- What areas need improvement?
- What are new and emerging trends?

I. Recreation

Bruce stated that Goal 1.1 pertained to Oak Ridge Town Park and whether Council wanted it to be a sports destination. Bruce said that this goal was currently labeled as ongoing with fields # 1 - 4 comprising 17.5% of the park's acreage. He said that building field #5 was still on the Capital Improvement Plan, and if completed would bring the park's acreage to 20%.

Bruce said that staff and Council were continuing to work on the Farmhouse Community Center which was Policy 1.1.2.

Bruce stated that Goal 1.2 would address issues with the site plan that was currently being done for Heritage Farm Park.

Councilman McClellan asked when dirt start would start moving in Heritage Farm Park, and Bruce replied in Spring 2023.

Councilwoman Pittman asked what other kinds of space or events would be happening at Heritage Farm Park. She said that many would like for the core of the property to continue to be farmed. Pittman asked if Council had any thoughtful conversation about exactly where the farming would take place and what land would be preserved.

Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman asked if Council would want to have someone actively farming at Heritage Farm Park. He said that the idea is that we see value in the heritage of farming and asked if Council would have someone farm with the obligation to provide tours and sell vegetables.

Councilman Sullivan said that he agreed that the hay provided a pretty landscape, but he did not know what degree of having agritourism would benefit the Town.

Mayor Schneider said that she liked the idea of investigating farming the core of the property and suggested talking with Kyle Anders regarding letting people know when he will be threshing hay.

Councilman McClellan said that he would like to see people engaged with helping with the farming at Heritage Farm Park. He asked what crops really would be driven by agritourism, and Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman responded that he was talking about demonstrations that would not be too large that would include a range of crops and selling the harvest.

Town Planner Sean Taylor suggested setting the property up like a farm and finding volunteers to assist. He said that the current field had been over farmed with tobacco farming and that it had drained all the nutrients from the soil.

Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman suggested investigating alternate examples of farming that could idealistically lead to having a working farm. He said that he would support individual farming of the property to continue for as long as possible.

Bruce summed up the discussion by saying that staff needed to talk with Kyle Anders to see how long he planned on farming at Heritage Farm Park and to discuss when no one is farming what the plan was next for bringing in more farmers and equipment.

Councilwoman Pittman said that she would like to protect the viewshed and suggested rewording Policy 1.2.4.

Mayor Schneider suggested adding information regarding Bandera Farm as a new goal under Recreation once Council decided what Oak Ridge's long-term involvement would be regarding that property. She said that she would like to see language about considering a long-term involvement with Bandera Farm due to the project growing exponentially since Oak Ridge agreed to be involved.

Councilman McClellan said that horses would not be feasible for Heritage Farm Park but could be allowed at Bandera Farm.

Councilwoman Pittman said that the second piece of Bandera Farm would not be conducive to horses but would likely become part of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail. She said that the goal was to connect Oak Ridge via the MST.

Mayor Schneider said that initially it was thought that Bandera Farm would be like the Cascades Preserve regarding the Town's level of maintenance. She said that Council could continue to focus on trails at Bandera Farm.

Councilwoman Pittman suggested adding Bandera Farm to Goal 1.3.

II. Growth and Development & III. Infrastructure

Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman said that Council had not spend a lot of time talking about plans for the Town's Extra Territorial Jurisdiction. He said that potentially pocket parks would allow convenient stores in the ETJ. He asked when it would be appropriate to discuss plans for the ETJ and if Council should repeat a voluntary annexation process or do we go ask the state for it.

Councilman McClellan said that he was opposed to a pocket commercial district. He said that energy was needed in the Town Core.

Mayor Schneider suggested putting the ETJ under Growth & Development and Council consider doing an update to the Land Use Plan.

Kinneman said that the reason that he suggested allowing some commercial development outside of the Town Core goes to the whole Village Feel walkability idea. He said that if a resident who lived on Haw River Road had to get into their car to drive into the Commercial Core to pick up a gallon of milk that was counter to the idea of walkability within the Town. Kinneman said that if the ETJ had some type of availability for potentially a convenience store then that would promote walkability.

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Councilwoman Pittman asked if Council could simply have a strategic goal that mentioned ETJ/LUP and looked for opportunities for development.

Taylor said that when ETJ was first brought into Oak Ridge the Town was protecting ourselves from Kernersville. He said that the Town was spending money on people who receive all our benefits and pay nothing.

Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman said that with voluntary annexation we could go to the state and ask them to give those properties to the Town.

Mayor Schneider suggested that the Town assess future development and the value of the ETJ.

Councilman McClellan said that he did not want to see Oak Ridge drop the ETJ because control would be lost.

Bruce said that he had captured the discussion and would update the Thoroughfare/Collector Street Plan, Trail/Pedestrian Plan and the Land Use Plan with special attention paid to the ETJ.

Schneider asked if the LUP Committee would look at the update to include the ETJ or would Council, and Bruce replied that the committee could if Council charged to them to do so.

Bruce said that most municipalities do Land Use Plans that are usually tied to a full Comprehensive Plan. He said now that Oak Ridge was beginning a water discussion that it might make sense to tie that into the infrastructure planning and LUP. Bruce said that if the Town moved forward with a water line through HWY 150 that it would go through the ETJ area which would make it attractive for development. He said that municipalities use their infrastructure to target where they want growth.

Schneider said that Town Attorney Michael Thomas had suggested targeting the Town's annexation efforts and suggested putting that language into the Strategic Plan that promoted responsible continuous growth.

Councilwoman Pittman said that Policy 2.4.1 was listed as complete and indicated that the Town had an annual annexation policy and wondered what the strategic piece was. She said that she felt that policy should be listed as ongoing given the consideration that was needed for the ETJ.

Schneider said would like to revisit Goal 2.1 and suggested updating the language to include that Oak Ridge would continue to award Historic Heritage Grants and that the CORE Initiative is on-going.

Schneider said Goal 2.2 reminded her that a lot of small/mid-size towns were doing an economic development plan and she thought that might be the next logical step from our Village Core. She suggested Council looking at what kinds of businesses/services are needed to serve not only Oak Ridge but the places beyond that.

Several Council members spoke about the apartments being built at I-73, and how that would impact northwest area schools, parks, Oak Ridge Youth Association, etc.

Kinneman said if a developer wanted to bring in 2,000 people to Oak Ridge that Town Council would probably have a strategic planning session the next day to consider what that would do to our Town. He said that effectively the Town was getting 2,000 people at our borders and wondered what proactive steps could be taken to encourage or discourage that type of growth.

Schneider said that a strategic plan was needed for commercial development and asked if the Town wanted to target certain kinds of businesses.

McClellan said that the Town had no control over residents living in the apartments off of I-73 because they lived in Greensboro. He said that Guilford County Schools would need to address the impact of how new development impacted northwest area schools. He encouraged preserving good relationships with school board members and with our local schools.

Council took a five-minute recess at 11:00 a.m.

Schneider said that in regard to economic development that the Town had resisted looking into branding for Oak Ridge. She said that she thought Council should begin thinking about branding so that Town signage was consistent. Schneider said that she would like to encourage and engage walkers but also wanted people to understand what Oak Ridge looked like.

Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman asked if Council members if they wanted Oak Ridge to become a destination town. He asked if we wanted to become an arts & crafts town that goes beyond our trails.

Taylor suggested that a market study be done so that true numbers could be reviewed to see if locals were using our park and/or people from other places.

Mayor Schneider asked if the Town needed a Comprehensive Plan, and Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman replied yes. He said that the upcoming NC 68/HWY 150 intersection improvements would be great but that if the Town wanted people to walk then traffic needed to slow down.

Kinneman said that he felt like NC 68 needed to appear visually narrower so that traffic would naturally slow down. He said that people would not want to walk there if cars were moving quickly.

Schneider said that she was an advocate for decreased speed limits on NC 68 said that the two planned roundabouts would slow traffic down.

Council members agreed that it would be difficult to monitor and enforce the speed limit on NC 68 due to law enforcement capacity issues.

Bruce said that Policy 3.2.1 would be updated and prioritized. He asked if Council wanted wastewater included, and Schneider replied yes. She said that she suggested adding that the Town was a municipal water supplier and added that she was an advocate for decreased speed limits on NC 68.

Kinneman said that he felt like NC 68 needed to appear visually narrower so that traffic would naturally slow down. He said that people would not want to walk there if cars were moving quickly.

Pittman said that a lot of what Kinneman was speaking about tied directly into the Streetscape Plan. She said that the Town had a plan that could be relied on by putting in conduits and installing landscaping.

Schneider suggested language be added to Goal 3.2 that stated that the Town was continuing to address strategies for traffic calming.

Bruce said that he felt like the Pedestrian Plan was still a relevant document that included the trails portion. Bruce said that staff anticipated updating the Pedestrian Plan, LUP, and Throughfare Plan in house without a consultant.

Councilwoman Pittman said that the sidewalk to Fogleman Road should have already been done, and Taylor responded that NCDOT did not include a sidewalk to Fogleman Road because of the gas line.

Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman said that if the Town brought sidewalks to Fogleman Road and the Ashton Park subdivision that included Bugle Run that close to 400 households would benefit from it.

Councilman Sullivan suggested that Council be intentional about adding sidewalks and prioritize their locations at the same time.

McClellan said that he supported building sidewalks down Hwy 150 to Oak Ridge Methodist Church. He suggested building sidewalks from the outside in and not from the core out.

Schneider said that she had another idea that was separate under the Growth and Development heading. She said that she would like to seek to build community in Oak Ridge by encouraging the development of more informed and engaged residents. She suggested hosting Town Council hosted monthly meetings for residents to learn what town committees do in person or virtually. Schneider encouraged Council to consider offering annual paid high school or college internships to educate young people about possible careers in government.

Pittman said that she liked all of Schneider's ideas and asked what staff involvement would look like. She said that she would not want to add a new project for staff to manage, and Schneider replied that staff would just need to post an announcement about the details of the event on Facebook and the website.

Kinneman said that he felt like Council members could do more by making Council meetings more accessible. He said that Council members did not allow people to converse with them virtually. Kinneman said that he did not understand why citizens could not make their comments live via a virtual situation. He also said that publicly written comments should be read into the record during Council meetings.

Schneider said that if the public were allowed to make comments virtually then the meeting would become a virtual meeting which could become problematic according to our town attorney.

McClellan said that when the Town had virtually meetings during Covid that it slowed the process down.

Sullivan said that having meetings available for citizens to view online was great. He said that if a citizen sent an email to a Council member that they had the ability to read it into the record if they felt it was important. Sullivan said that if the School of Government and the town attorney advised that having a virtual Town Council meeting could be problematic then he suggested allowing that process to play out until there was a definite answer.

Pittman said that she had no problem with remote participation but acknowledged that there was some risk right now with conducting virtual Town Council meetings. She encouraged citizens to email, call or attend Town Council meetings to share their concerns.

Council took a lunch break.

IV. Preservation

Bruce stated that there was just one goal for preservation.

Pittman said that there were a couple of properties that the Piedmont Land Conservancy was interested in and asked if there had been discussions with property owners, and Bruce replied that there was a property on Beeson Road that might be donated to the town and another property on E. Harrell Road that the owner might want to sell.

Schneider said that she would like to add Preservation NC with Piedmont Land Conservancy in Policy 4.1.3. She said that she thought the Historic Preservation Commission needed to discuss what the Historic Heritage Grant program had accomplished and to perhaps come up with a different template. Schneider suggested that Council start a restricted fund that would be replenished only when needed. She said that she thought the Town needed to find a way to work with Oak Ridge Military Academy so that relationship could be strengthened.

Pittman said that she would consider funding the restricted fund at a certain level and if it was not enough to approve that the funds could be rolled over.

Schneider suggested increasing the grant amount.

Kinneman said that he would be in favor of a rollover and that Council should continue to fund the Historic Heritage Grant program. He suggested that a special category be created to allow to offer grants greater than \$2,000. Kinneman said that he would be supportive of the Town talking with ORMA regarding purchasing Bonner Field House and the field.

Schneider said that she would be supportive of assisting with any opportunities with ORMA.

Schneider said that the topic of the website had been skipped in the discussion. She said that the website had been updated and that it needed to be strengthened with

the goal of keeping citizens better informed. Schneider said that the information on Facebook needed to be corollary on the website. She said that adding online bill payment and shelter reservation scheduling would be added to the website in the future.

Pittman said that items such as the Mountains-to-Sea Trail needed to be added to the website, and Bruce said that he would take a stab of bringing the MST information up to date.

4. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Jim Kinneman made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 12:50 p.m. Councilman Spencer Sullivan seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously (5-0).

Respectfully Submitted:

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

Ann K. Schneider
Mayor