



**OAK RIDGE TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING
OCTOBER 21, 2020 – 2:00 P.M.
OAK RIDGE FIRE DEPARTMENT
8325 LINVILLE ROAD, OAK RIDGE, NC**

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
Sam Anders, Finance Officer
Terry Lannon, Parks & Recreation
Director

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Ann Schneider called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

2. APPROVE AGENDA

Mayor Pro Tem Jim Kinneman motioned to approve the meeting agenda as presented. Councilman George McClellan seconded, and the motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

3. STAFF UPDATE ON PARTF RESULTS AND FEEDBACK

Parks & Recreation Director Terry Lannon reported that the Town had not been awarded a grant from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF), despite the fact that the Town had scored 10th highest out of 66 applicants. Of a requested \$22 million, the state had awarded only \$5.2 million in grants. Lannon said feedback he had received indicated there was very little that kept the Town from receiving a top-rated score, but the fact that the Town could have gotten feedback from an additional civic group – which it did not because of the COVID-19 pandemic – might have made a slight difference. He added that a lot of grants awarded had been to second- and even third-time applicants, and that demographics and location within the state may have also had some bearing on the decision.

Councilman Doug Nodine asked if politics played a role in the decision. Councilman McClellan said if so, he would be glad to contact representatives at the state level if the application were resubmitted. Mayor Schneider asked what feedback the Town might give to a state representative, suggesting perhaps telling them that a grant award would be good not only for the Town, but also for the region.

Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman said if applications are submitted multiple times, the slight changes made to them each time would likely make them more attractive. He

also said the fact that some municipalities are persevering and applying multiple times might help.

McClellan said it was fortunate that our representative in the State House is also chair of the state Appropriations Committee. Councilwoman Pittman said she was not sure that was relevant since the funding for the grants does not come from the General Assembly, but from a different source.

4. REVISIONS TO WHITAKER PROPERTY MASTER PLAN AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN DISCUSSION/APPROVAL

As discussion ensued, Council discussed what changes might be considered to make the grant application more attractive. Pittman asked if it seemed to make any difference that the Town did not ask for the entire \$500,000 maximum grant amount. Schneider said as a somewhat affluent community, she thought it was probably wise for Oak Ridge to keep its portion of what it would be willing to pay for relatively high.

Schneider said she thought Council needed to decide at the meeting whether to apply again for the grant, to determine how to adjust the application, and decide how to move forward. She said she thought Council should also discuss a contingency plan in case a grant is not awarded to the Town in 2021 either.

5. 2021 PARTF GRANT APPLICATION DISCUSSION/APPROVAL

Councilman McClellan motion to reapply for a PARTF grant in 2021, and Councilwoman Pittman seconded.

McClellan pointed out that if the Town does not receive a grant in 2021, then it will be two years behind in its goals. Schneider said that was not necessarily true if Council makes a contingency plan now.

Councilwoman Pittman asked what types of things could be done now that would not affect the grant application so the Town would be shovel-ready to move forward next year. Town Manager Bill Bruce said work such as an engineering and a grading plan could be done now. In response to a question from Nodine, Bruce said construction planning and administration is generally calculated at 10 percent of a project's total cost, which would be around \$90,000.

Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman said he thought the motion on the table should be the last thing decided by the Council, since that decision would be based on what Council agrees to fund now or if it decides to delay submitting the application. After discussion Schneider said she thought the general consensus was that Council wanted to move forward. She said the Council could make some relatively minor changes to the application for items that had been considered for future construction, such as perhaps adding a basketball court, but that major changes should not be made to the application since the Town had already invested a lot in the current Whitaker Property Master Plan.

Nodine said he thought Council should minimize any changes it makes to the Whitaker Property Master Plan. If Council wants to make any major changes, those projects should be considered outside the scope of the grant since the Town already has what seems to be a competitive application.

Pittman said she was OK with keeping the grant proposal open-ended, and she was OK with the motion to move forward with resubmitting a grant request.

Council's vote on the motion to reapply for a PARTF grant in 2021 was passed unanimously (5-0).

Schneider then asked what, if anything, the Town should do in the interim before grant applications are submitted again.

Kinneman, who is a representative for the Town on the Oak Ridge Youth Association (ORYA) Board, said ORYA had a concern about field availability because of weather, and they would like to discuss installation of artificial turf on one or more fields. He said ORYA had indicated it would be willing to do fundraising activities to help offset the cost of the artificial turf. He said the Council had also briefly discussed the possibility of offering to purchase the athletic field and Bonner Field House from Oak Ridge Military Academy (ORMA). He said such a purchase would ensure no development would occur on the corner at N.C. 68 and Oak Ridge Road (N.C. 150), but the Town would also obtain a building with a basketball court that could be used for a community center. He said he knew both the athletic field and field house would need a lot of work because they are located below grade and of how the water pools when it rains.

Schneider said Kinneman's ideas were interesting, but she did not think she was interested in purchasing Bonner Field House because of ORMA's antiquated water system and the Town's purchase would cause the system to no longer be grandfathered. She also said she would not be willing to scrap the current plan at the Whitaker property in favor of the purchase at ORMA. Kinneman said the Town could work on that separately while waiting on the PARTF grant for the Whitaker property.

Parks & Recreation Director Lannon said if the Town were to establish trails on the Whitaker property, it would count as a pilot program so long as the Town did not grade or pave them. He said he thought that would count in the Town's favor on the PARTF grant application.

McClellan asked what was included in site preparation, and Bruce said grading and putting in utilities.

Schneider said she thought that part of the project could be accomplished without significantly changing the project, and the Town would be ready to hit the ground running whether it obtains a PARTF grant in 2021 or not. Pittman agreed, and Lannon said the Town could start obtaining the actual construction documents, which would be needed for the Whitaker property project.

Pittman asked whether it would be considered a significant change to the application if it spent 10 percent for surveying, site planning, site design and construction management. Town Manager Bruce said the Town's consultant had

said he felt that would not hurt the Town's grant request and might even help it by demonstrating the Town's commitment toward moving forward on the project. Bruce said construction management would still be needed, so the Town would not be spending the entire 10 percent.

Pittman asked if it would be considered a major change to the grant application to consider installing artificial turf at the Whitaker property, and Bruce said yes.

Finance Officer Sam Anders asked if the Town could get the engineer's sealed documents prepared, would it not be ready to have the packet ready to put out to bid as soon as the grant is awarded. Bruce said yes.

McClellan asked if the Town does not get a grant in 2021 and wanted to move ahead with construction, would the plan be considered shovel-ready at that point. Bruce said yes, adding that once permits and sealed drawings had been obtained, the project could be spread out over 5 years if Council wanted that.

Schneider suggested the Town might move ahead in that manner and also add in the cost of a basketball court, considering again once those cost estimates had been obtained. She said the Council could ask for slightly less money in its grant request.

Bruce said Council should be mindful of efficiencies that occur when different elements are built at the same time.

Councilman McClellan motioned to have staff prepare a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for site planning, preliminary design, and survey and/or cost of preparing the construction documents with the cost not to exceed 20 percent of the project and to remove \$169,879 from the projected cost. Mayor Schneider offered a friendly amendment to not include the specific dollar amount, and McClellan agreed. The motion died for lack of a second.

After Council discussion, Council's consensus was to discuss the issues more before taking a vote. Councilwoman Pittman said she would like to discuss the possible installation of artificial turf and the issues at ORMA brought up by Kinneman.

Parks & Recreation Director Lannon asked if ORYA was talking about raising funds to purchase and install artificial turf, for resurfacing in 10-12 years, for the equipment that would need to be purchased to care for it, or something else. Kinneman said he thought ORYA understood the difference in price between artificial turf and the real thing and that an agreement would have to be fleshed out between them and the Town. He said he thought they were being sincere and were willing to discuss the issue.

Lannon said that, in reality, the fields do not get closed down that often because of weather conditions, and that there were plenty of times ORYA had chosen not to play because the weather was too rainy or too messy rather than because the fields were closed. He estimated the fields were closed about three times per year. He said artificial turf required special equipment to maintain it and care included brushing in the crumb rubber infill and spraying to prevent MRSA infections. He said he was also not a big fan of artificial turf due to the number of ACL injuries that occur to athletes playing on it and, because it can get so hot, the possibility of heat strokes occurring. He said high schools in western Pennsylvania, where he was from, reported having to replace artificial turf every 10 to 12 years because it does wear

out. Lannon said the issue had arisen at Parks & Recreation Advisory Board meetings about four years ago and he had been collecting articles and data, which he had shared with the ORYA president. He also said that he was more lenient about leaving athletic fields open than he had been when they had first opened and the turf had not had a good opportunity to take root and mature.

Kinneman said when the Town has four multipurpose athletic fields, perhaps one at a time could be taken out of use to give it time to recover from damage. Lannon agreed but said that would also require cooperation from ORYA. Kinneman said the point was that there are drainage problems at ORMA, which might be a good location for artificial turf, as might the fields at Mustang Fitness. Lannon said either of those locations would be a good candidate.

Pittman said she had not heard that ORYA would be willing to help pay for artificial turf. She pointed out that organizations such as ORYA experience constant turnover as athletes age out of the program and their parents are no longer involved. The long-term financial responsibilities are often not understood after those leaders are no longer part of the organization. She said that would be her concern about relying on them for financial assistance.

Mayor Schneider said she wondered if discussion of the possible purchase of the ORMA athletic field would be better suited to be held during the annual Capital Improvement Program (CIP) meeting next year. Regarding the conversation about artificial turf, she said she understood the various concerns and was unaware of the types of new equipment that would need to be purchased and health concerns. She said she thought installation of artificial turf at the Whitaker property would be a major change to the PARTF grant application.

Councilwoman Pittman agreed with Schneider that the conversation that day should be only about what the Council wants to do about the Whitaker property. She said she did want to discuss the ORMA property, because she thought there was some validity.

Councilman McClellan motioned to have staff prepare a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for the Whitaker property plan. Councilwoman Pittman seconded.

Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman said he wanted Council to be flexible enough so that the Town is ready to move forward even if it is not awarded a PARTF grant in 2021.

Councilman Nodine said he was OK with moving forward, but he wanted to be sure that the Town does not harm its chances of obtaining a grant in the next cycle. He said his idea would be to just space out construction at the Whitaker property if a grant is not awarded, perhaps completing it in five to eight years instead of three.

Pittman said the Council could always approve an amendment to the budget or the CIP. She said trails are already on the property, and she would like to discuss opening them up.

Schneider said she definitely wanted to open a perimeter trail on the property while waiting for the next grant. She also said she wanted to consider putting in a basketball court at the Whitaker property since it had already been vetted and would give the Town additional points on the PARTF grant application for

constructing a new amenity. She agreed with Kinneman, who had earlier pointed out that the Town had the opportunity to borrow money or slow down future construction if the grant is not obtained.

Council's vote in favor of the motion was unanimous (5-0).

Councilman Nodine moved to consider opening a temporary trail on the Whitaker property. Mayor Schneider asked to make a friendly amendment to include wheel stops to manage parking, and Nodine agreed to the amendment. Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman seconded, and the motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

Schneider asked if any other changes should be made to the PARTF grant application, and Lannon suggested allowing the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board to first comment or make recommendations. Schneider asked if any other Council members were in favor of adding a basketball court to the application if it does not change the application too much. Nodine said he was concerned that the public was not allowed to comment on that addition, and Bruce pointed out that a basketball court was actually on the Whitaker Property Master Plan and had been vetted. It would just need to be changed from a future amenity to a current one.

Lannon pointed out that there would be a difference in cost if the basketball court were going to be lit at night.

Kinneman said when a well is dug on the property, which is not included in the grant application, it could possibly be expanded and added to the future Town water system. Schneider said that might be a question which should first be discussed by the Water Advisory Committee.

Schneider asked if a decision should be made on including the basketball court in the grant request. Council's consensus was to wait until more information is available. Schneider asked if Council wanted to decide what specific dollar amount should be requested in the grant. The consensus of Council was to wait until more information is available.

Nodine asked if the consultant would have to be paid to amend the grant application. Bruce said it would likely cost \$2,000 to \$3,000 to have them update the application.

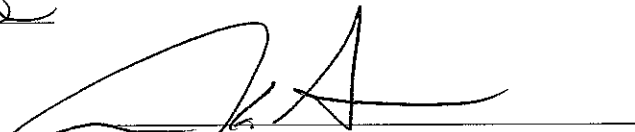
6. ADJOURNMENT

Councilman McClellan made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:34 p.m Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman seconded, and the motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

Respectfully Submitted:



Sandra B. Smith, CMC, NCCMC
Town Clerk


Ann K. Schneider, Mayor