



**OAK RIDGE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
NOVEMBER 7, 2024 - 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, Town Clerk/Asst. Town Mgr.
Michael Thomas, Town Attorney
Sam Anders, Finance Officer

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

A. Invocation

Autumn Fite of BSA Troop 219 offered the invocation.

B. Pledge of Allegiance

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Councilwoman Ann Schneider made a motion to delay the presentation of agenda item 9 – Annual Financial Audit Report - until the following month of December. Councilman Michael Greeson seconded, and the motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mayor Pro Tem Mike Stone made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 3, 2024, regular meeting, and Councilwoman Ann Schneider seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

4. RESOLUTIONS, PROCLAMATIONS, ANNOUNCEMENTS

The month of November was proclaimed as National American Indian Heritage Month at the request of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution

American Indians Committee. The Guilford Battle Chapter of the DAR was represented by members Anna Claspell, Barbara Engel, and Gigi Danner.

5. REPORT FROM GUILFORD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

No representative from the Guilford County Sheriff's office was present, but the report for the month of October 2024 was included in the council meeting packet and made available at the back table of the chamber.

6. REPORT FROM OAK RIDGE FIRE DEPARTMENT

Lieutenant Ritchie along with most of the members of shift B attended the meeting. Ritchie reported 286 hours of training, most of which occurred at the new training center. He stated that the department responded to 88 calls during the month, 41 of which were medically related calls, five involved motor vehicle accidents, 14 were false alarms and the remainder were calls for service. Ritchie advocated having reflective address signs on homes to improve visibility of a home's address especially at night. He noted that the fire department sold reflective address signs.

7. ANNUAL FINANCIAL AUDIT REPORT

Continued to December

8. PUBLIC COMMENTS

- Bill Goebel, 1402 Westridge Road in Greensboro, noted appreciation for the support received during his run for a seat on the Guilford County School Board.
- Patti Dmuchowski, 7320 Hidden View Drive, commented on her disfavor of recording Special Events Committee meetings, citing that no other neighboring town has adopted such a practice and that all meetings were open and amply publicized.
- Martha Pittman, 8018 Fogleman Drive, spoke in disfavor of recording committee meetings owing to the risk of sowing a sense of distrust of committee members and dampening open and creative discourse among committee members.
- Stephanie Ferrell, 5839 Billett Road, voiced disfavor of recording committee meetings for three reasons: Recording meetings would: 1) discourage free discourse among members and expose the meeting content to misinterpretation, 2) be a redundant task as meetings are open, recorded in written form, and committee chairs are available for open dialog, and 3) cause volunteers to leave.
- Ben Walraven, 5931 Pepper Road, underscored his disfavor of recording committee meetings for the sense of distrust implied by the act and the risk for misinterpretation of recorded remarks.

- John Jenkins, 6700 Ashton Park Drive, reinforced sentiments already expressed in disfavor of recording committee meetings, stating that he saw no reason beyond what had already been expressed for all meetings to be recorded.
- Roy Nydorf, 1815 Oak Ridge Road, registered his disfavor of recording committee meetings because committees like the Tree Committee conducted many their activities in the field and recording the meeting would be cumbersome.
- Parks & Recreation Advisory Board Co-Chair Adrian Eckenrod, 5679 Timber Trace Way, reiterated similar discord over recording committee meetings, noting that free thought and discourse among committee members would be stifled and recordings could be used for nefarious intent. He noted that recordings would not serve a useful purpose as committee meetings are open and recorded in written form.

9. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

A. Consideration/Approval of:

- **Appointments of Allison Corado as regular member on Tree Committee and Holly Stewart as alternate on Finance Committee**

Mayor Pro Tem Mike Stone made a motion to approve the appointments and Councilman Michael Greeson seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

- **Reappointment of Adrian Eckenrod as regular member on Parks & Recreation Advisory Board**

Councilwoman Ann Schneider made a motion to approve the reappointment and Councilman Jim Harton seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

B. Any other business

Town Manager Bill Bruce presented a letter of support for the Town of Summerfield's application to the Great Trails State Program for the construction of the Piedmont Greenway in Bandera Farms Park. Bruce explained that the grant fund was approximately \$300,000 with a required match provided by Guilford County through ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) disbursement.

Councilwoman Ann Schneider made a motion to approve submitting the letter of support to the Town of Summerfield and Councilman Jim Harton seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

10. NEW BUSINESS

A. Consideration/Approval of Resolution R-2024-13 to Accept Funds from the 2023 Appropriations Act Directed Projects Grant for water system

Bruce explained that approval of R-2024-13 would confirm the Town's acceptance of funds from the 2023 Appropriations Act, which included \$4.5 million earmarked for infrastructure of the Town's water system. He pointed out that the funds would be applied towards the construction of the water main along NC 150 from the Forsyth County line to the elevated water tank, which would be located behind Town Hall. He stated that the water tower would be funded separately by ARPA funds disbursed by Guilford County. He added that administrative fees would be retained by the state, resulting in a total disbursement of \$4,432,400. He stated that acceptance of the funds would constitute the Town's agreement to use the funds per the terms of the approved scope of work for the construction of the water main.

Councilman Jim Harton made a motion to approve R-2024-13 and Councilman Michael Greeson seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

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

Councilwoman Ann Schneider circulated revisions to page 4 of the proposed Farmhouse Community Center Policy to Council members to highlight an update to resident/nonprofit, nonresident, and senior citizen rental fees. She proposed separating the fees under each residency type for greater clarity and added revised verbiage to describe the senior citizen discount. The revision stated that senior citizens 65 and older who are residents of Oak Ridge were eligible to rent the Farmhouse for a maximum of two hours Monday through Thursday at no cost, based on availability, and that any additional hours requested would be subject to the scheduled resident rate.

Councilman Michael Greeson commented that the proposed rental rate of \$20 per hour was insufficient to generate sufficient revenue to sustain an \$800,000 project of which the Town had invested \$380,000 to \$400,000. To illustrate this point, he calculated 50 hours of rental in one month would generate only \$1,000.

Mayor Pro Tem Mike Stone noted his request to Mayor Kinneman to pull the discussion of the Farmhouse Policy from the meeting agenda due to what he had perceived as its incompleteness. He pointed to several areas which he deemed required greater clarification or a supporting written policy and presented the following aspects of the policy for additional consideration by the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board and staff:

- **Parking:** Guidelines are needed to define the process of requesting and approving additional onsite parking as well as identifying where additional parking could be located.
- **Alcoholic beverages:** A written policy is required to accurately define allowances and restrictions regarding serving alcohol, who has the authority to ensure compliance, and what the consequences are for violations of the policy.
- **Event signage:** A written policy is required to describe allowable signage within the park and the Farmhouse.
- **Vendors:** Criteria should be established to define acceptable types of vendors permitted to operate out of the Farmhouse.

- Insurance: The broad scope of the term “commercial use” of the Farmhouse should be more clearly defined when requiring \$1 million liability insurance to rent the Farmhouse. Stone contended that commercial use could refer to multiple business ventures from corporations or political organizations to exercise classes, small-scale farmers markets, and arts or craft shows.
- Inclement weather: The section describing inclement weather was confusing to Stone as it included several contingencies outside of weather-related issues such as acts of God, war and terrorism.
- Private events: Stone questioned if private events which involve commerce such as fees to attend an exercise class would require the proposed \$1 million liability insurance policy.
- Public events: Stone questioned if public events such as pop-up shops or gallery events which involve commerce would require the proposed \$1 million liability insurance policy.
- Fees: Stone believed the proposed fees were extraordinarily low and questioned if a comparative analysis was conducted to arrive at the proposed rates. He questioned if the daily cost to operate and maintain the facility had been studied and if the rates proposed could generate revenue sufficient to support such expenses. He questioned if the rates proposed were competitive with other similar operations. He questioned how to distinguish between resident and non-resident rates against the renter and the users of the facility. Stone disagreed with the notion of giving away free rental time of the Farmhouse. He believed that reduced rates for use by senior citizens, nonprofit organizations and town committees needed more specific definition.

Stone concluded that the policy, while a good start, should be returned to the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board and staff for more deliberation and greater clarification.

Councilman Jim Harton supported updating the policy to reflect that caterers should be required to carry a current ABC license and that bartenders should be licensed to serve alcohol at the Farmhouse. He did not object to the idea of a senior citizen rental discount but asked for a better understanding of the application of the discount, how to safeguard against abuse of the discount, and how to guard against the possibility of a predominance of discounted rentals preventing other rental opportunities from taking place.

In the interest of accuracy, Schneider pointed out that the Farmhouse was not an \$800,000 project, but a \$650,000 project for which \$380,000 was funded through grants. She acknowledged the efforts of the Parks & Recreation (P&R) Advisory Board in developing a usage policy for it and commented that, based on her 30 years of experience in writing policies, she believed that a policy was best when it did not attempt to address every possible use of a facility. She contended that the use of the Farmhouse would be overseen by the Parks Superintendent and the P&R Advisory Board, who are versed in managing park-related issues. Schneider pointed out that the language built into the policy legally placed responsibility for libelous situations on the renter and cleared the Town of liability, thereby effectively releasing the Town from needing to police activity at the Farmhouse. She asked Town Attorney Michael Thomas for verification of this understanding.

Thomas responded that the intent of the policy as written was to indemnify and hold the Town harmless and to cause users to provide insurance against liability created by them or their participants. He added that nothing could be done to prevent the Town or its citizens from being sued but, if sued, the policy would protect the Town from liability.

Schneider pointed out that staff and the P&R Advisory Board had studied several other policies of neighboring rental facilities and had consulted with the Town's insurer, the North Carolina League of Municipalities, and found that the policy they had developed was consistent with their discoveries. To answer Stone's concerns regarding vetting vendors who request the use of the Farmhouse, Schneider explained that Board members were well acquainted with area vendors and would be able to adequately review such requests. She pointed out that while the Farmhouse alcohol policy and fee schedule were within Council's purview to change, all other aspects of the Farmhouse's operation were technically within the P&R Advisory Board's purview. Regarding the requirement for \$1 million liability insurance for commercial uses of the Farmhouse, Schneider proposed making the insurance requirement discretionary based on the renter. She addressed the concerns voiced regarding insufficient revenue returns on the Farmhouse by stating that the Farmhouse, like the Town's parks, were investments the Town had made to serve the residents rather than investments intended for profit. She pointed out that the senior residents of the Town had actively supported the Town's efforts to provide these recreational resources. She believed that offering seniors the opportunity to use facilities during times of anticipated low volume at no cost was appropriate. She noted that policies and fees could be changed later if needed, but she favored having low rates for seniors and residents/nonprofits to encourage more use of the Town's facilities. She believed the policy to be well thought out and favored its approval with only minor revisions for clarification.

Regarding the proposed senior citizen discount, Mayor Jim Kinneman expressed concern over developing a policy which would cater to seniors on a broad scale. He suggested instead a program that would allocate a scheduled time on selected days, during which the Farmhouse would be open to senior residents of Oak Ridge to use. He acknowledged that the parks were optimized for youth sports and stated that he would be inclined to support a scheduled program allotted to senior citizen use of the Farmhouse. Kinneman turned to the issue of requiring liability insurance for commercial uses of the Farmhouse and asked for more details on what triggered the need for the \$1 million policy. He added that he thought the section of the policy regarding reservation cancellation was mislabeled as "Inclement Weather" and should instead be more appropriately titled as "Reasons for Cancellation." Kinneman pointed out that the Farmhouse would not be available to rent until after the beginning of the year after the building, parking lot, and sidewalks had been completed, so there was no rush to finalize the usage policy. He asked Thomas if he had reviewed the policy and what he thought of it.

Thomas responded that he had reviewed the section of the policy dealing with alcohol and deferred the rest of the policy to the consideration of the Board and staff.

Kinneman opened the discussion to rebuttals.

Greeson asked Thomas if he agreed with the alcohol policy as proposed. Thomas responded that he believed the guidelines outlined in the alcohol policy were sufficient.

Schneider commented on Kinneman's suggestion to develop a senior program at the Farmhouse and pointed out that senior citizens could develop and manage their own programs without adding this task to staff. She believed that this would encourage more people to use the Farmhouse space.

Stone asked what the next step for considering the Farmhouse policy would be. Kinneman responded that the next step would depend on Council members. He noted that he would favor returning the policy to the P&R Advisory Board to ask for more clarity on previously discussed issues. Schneider added that she thought the policy as presented was acceptable with the exception of needing greater clarity on the definition of commercial use. Harton stated his understanding that Council had been asked to consider only the alcohol policy and fee schedule for the Farmhouse. He thought the updated alcohol policy was acceptable, but said he had questions relating to the fee schedule. He acknowledged that the fee proposed had been compared to rates of other like facilities and commented that fees could always be changed in the future if necessary. He favored moving forward with consideration of the alcohol policy and fee schedule.

Councilwoman Ann Schneider made a motion to approve the Farmhouse Community Center fee schedule and alcohol policy and include the changes suggested by Councilman Harton to the alcohol policy and the suggestions made by herself to clarify the resident fee structure for senior citizens. She added that the policy would be returned to the P&R Advisory Board for further review of commercial usage of the Farmhouse. Councilman Jim Harton seconded the motion.

Greeson remarked that he would prefer that Council consider the entire policy after it received further review by the P&R Advisory Board. He pointed out that the Farmhouse would not be available for rent until February or March of 2025 and indicated that there was no hurry to push forward with approval of a section of the policy.

Stone expressed that the Town would ultimately be responsible for the facility and its policies and disagreed with being asked to only review the alcohol policy and fee schedule. He requested to include the issues he identified in the policy in the motion to return the policy to the P&R Advisory Board for its reconsideration. He reinforced Greeson's observation that there was no rush to approve the policy until it had been reviewed and revised in its entirety.

Schneider pointed out that she believed that she had sufficiently addressed each issue which Stone had identified. She reiterated her opinion that the policy was suitable for approval and that she believed that the P&R Advisory Board could manage operational issues as they emerge. She pointed out that the concern regarding commercial use of the Farmhouse had been included in her motion for additional attention, but that she regarded the other issues presented in discussion were smaller issues which the Advisory Board and Park Superintendent were

competent to address and manage. She was open to having Stone add a friendly amendment to her motion.

Harton clarified that although he had been out of the country for the last month, he had understood that his responsibility was to review the alcohol policy and fee schedule, which he stated was his rationale behind seconding Schneider's motion.

Kinneman said he did not favor soliciting approval of parts of the policy but preferred instead to ask that the P&R Advisory Board review all comments made at the meeting and consider possible readjustments to the proposed policy as a whole.

Town Manager Bill Bruce explained that Council was being asked to only consider the Farmhouse alcohol policy and fee schedule because the P&R Advisory Board maintained authority over park rules and regulations and by extension the parks' operational policies. These policies do not specifically require Council's approval. Regarding the management of alcohol in the park, he noted that this policy had previously been an exception granted by Council for use at Music in the Park events only. He rationalized that a policy for alcohol at the Farmhouse should similarly call for a review by Council. Pertaining to the review of the fees, Bruce stated that the rental fees were a budget item, which is under Council's purview to manage. He clarified, however, that Council can choose to have oversight over any Town policies that it deems fit.

Schneider stated that she was in favor of moving forward with approving the alcohol and fee components of the policy.

Greeson questioned approving sections of the policy when the Farmhouse itself was not yet ready to be rented. He said he favored returning the policy to the P&R Advisory Board for additional review.

Mayor Pro Tem Mike Stone made a substitute motion to delay consideration and approval of the Farmhouse Community Center alcohol policy and fee schedule until the January 2025 meeting. Councilman Michael Greeson seconded the motion.

Stone said he believed that there was no rush to approve the policy and that a period of eight weeks to reconsider all of its components would be acceptable. Harton countered that delay was unnecessary and noted his preference to move forward with approval. Schneider questioned delaying the consideration of the policy to January rather than to December. Stone explained that the delay of eight weeks afforded the Board plenty of time to reconsider the policy along with all the concerns voiced at the meeting. Schneider stated that moving forward with the policy approval would push the document closer to its finalization when it could be made available to the public to learn more about the Farmhouse and its use. Kinneman reiterated his disfavor of considering only parts of the policy and noted his consent to delay the consideration of the policy until December when the entire policy would be presented for reconsideration. He asked Stone to amend his motion and delay the discussion to the meeting in December. He also asked for greater elaboration of the policy to describe how the Farmhouse would be managed.

Mayor Pro Tem Mike Stone amended his substitute motion to delay consideration and approval of the Farmhouse Community Center alcohol policy and fee schedule to the December 2024 meeting. Councilman Michael Greeson seconded the motion. The motion passed (3-2) with Councilwoman Ann Schneider and Councilman Jim Harton voting against.

Greeson asked Bruce for a timeframe for the completion of construction at the Farmhouse, noting that the date of completion had been delayed on three separate prior occasions. Bruce replied that no timeframe had been established in writing by Bar Construction Company.

C. Consideration/Approval of request to record all committee and public meetings conducted but the Town effective November 8, 2024

Kinneman opened the floor to Stone, who initiated the request to record all committee meetings. Stone stated that Oak Ridge Councils in the past had regularly adjusted policies and procedures governing committees to provide a standard for best practices as well as clear direction for operation. He commented that policies should be adaptable to changes as the Town grows, and regulations and plans change. He noted that conversation on this topic was first held in an open, recorded meeting in March as a general housekeeping measure to promote a consistent application of the best practices already in place. He pointed out that his original proposition was to audio, not video, record all committees. He stated that many committees were already being audio recorded and advocated that the same practice be implemented in all other committees. He alluded to growing support for livestreaming meetings and indicated that audio recordings would be available upon request to citizens.

Greeson believed that the policy for recording committees should be the same for all committees. He suggested setting up Zoom meetings as a trial for six months.

Harton prefaced his remarks with his belief that not every Town committee should be organized and function in the same fashion. He pointed out the dissimilarity between committees and commissions by stating that commissions such as the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) were required to follow strict codified statutes established by State Legislature. He noted that study and understanding of these codes were required by members of HPC to be effective, contributing members of the commission. He added that it takes time for new members to learn the content and process of their committee's operations. He explained that all committees had their unique issues and focus, and their members likewise bring unique skills and interests their respective committees. He noted that committees and their members may not be interchangeable due to the uniqueness of their focus. For these reasons, Harton said he did not believe that all committees should be managed in the same way. He believed that Council should provide direction and set expectations for committees but should not mandate how the committees operate. He thought that recording committees would intimidate members and create restraint in their actions. He pointed out that most committee chairs had already raised objections to being recorded and said he believed that Council should honor their requests. He emphasized that committee members were volunteers and not elected officials. Harton admitted that the discussion of recording committees was akin to putting the "cart before the horse," and that Council should instead be

discussing how to generate a greater cadre of citizens to join the Town's committees. He noted his openness to making meetings accessible via Zoom, which would enable citizens to observe how committees function and in turn raise their interest in participating.

Schneider believed that the request to record all committees was unnecessary because it did not stem from a specific need, nor did it address an existing problem. She pointed out that the request instead stemmed from a particular Council member's need to know the proceedings of a committee meeting without attending that meeting. She acknowledged that personal schedules may prevent attendance at meetings, but she advocated interaction with committees as a more efficient method to accomplish Town business. She emphasized that Council members and volunteers work to serve the community's needs, and not the other way around. Schneider pointed out that recording meetings of statutory committees such as Planning & Zoning and HPC are useful because the meeting contents are complex and the recordings aid staff in developing accurate minutes of the meetings. However, she pointed out that other committees were working groups who freely exchange ideas during discussions of various topics. She pointed out that necessary context, background, and foreknowledge of the matters being discussed in the recording would be absent and could lead to confusion or misinterpretation by a listener. Schneider pointed out that no other similar-sized town engaged in such a practice and added that no committee member or resident had requested this action. In fact, she stressed that all committees had unanimously voted against implementing this action, with some even volunteers voicing that they would step down from their committees if the action were to take place. Schneider said that citizen involvement in the Town was a significant factor in its success and she was concerned about the risk of losing such involvement if recordings were to take place during all meetings. She questioned how to replace the experience and dedication of volunteers who would resign from their committees. She voiced concern that enforcing the recording of meetings would signal a profound distrust of committees because it was tantamount to surveilling their actions, an action, she pointed out, was one which Stone had been notably against when it pertained to the operation of security cameras in the park.

Schneider recalled past unsuccessful efforts to limit Council members' attendance at committee meetings and this proposal would make it unnecessary for Council members to attend because recordings would instead be available in lieu of in-person attendance. She argued that many avenues existed to obtain information on a committee or to interact with committee members. She stated that subjecting committees to being recorded would be stifling. She pointed out that both the mayor and mayor pro tem advocated livestreaming meetings, which she opposed, reiterating Harton's contention that the volunteers were not elected officials subject to the same requirements of government transparency. She admitted that she was less opposed to making meetings accessible via Zoom but pointed out the challenges of operating on this platform, which would require staff involvement to monitor undesirable exposure to hackers. She stressed that Council should instead be focused on seeking strategies to garner greater citizen engagement at Council and committee meetings. She emphasized that being present was how to create community.

Kinneman stated that the purpose for public meetings was to ensure transparency in government decision making. He stressed that Council's shared goal should be to make all board and committee meetings accessible to all citizens and that providing a transparent and accessible government was fundamental to serving the community. He argued that those with work and family obligations or mobility challenges which prevent them from attending public meetings in person should be able to see and hear decisions being made which affect them. He added that ensuring transparency in government activities could be confusing, but it should not be optional, as it is a responsibility of government. He added that a consistent operating procedure for all committees would be a step toward an open government, which builds trust and fosters the engagement of an informed community. Kinneman stressed that the Town should take the initiative to lead the movement to make government processes available to all citizens. He pointed out that some non-statutory committees such as Finance and Parks & Recreation Advisory Board are already being recorded. He remarked that the Finance Committee, which deals with sensitive and difficult issues, fully engages in discussion of such issues despite being recorded. He contended that written minutes of public meetings should contain all information including that which could be controversial to be fully accurate and transparent. He argued that if recording an idea or a controversial issue is problematic, then that matter should not be discussed in an open meeting. Kinneman clarified that his goal had always been to make all meetings accessible to all citizens, rather than to monitor meetings. He added that he would be open to considering exemptions for some committees from recordings.

Greeson inquired about the source of distrust alluded to in regard to recording committee meetings. He noted that no Council member with whom he had spoken about this issue had claimed any distrust of committee members. He asked if Schneider had originated the concept of distrust. Schneider responded that she did not conceive of the concept but had instead heard from committee members that the policy conveyed a sense of distrust of committees.

Greeson said he supported Kinneman's position on government transparency and added that he would find recordings useful if he could not attend a meeting. He pointed out that he had attempted to read minutes of one committee but discovered that minutes from their meetings had not been posted on the website since March. In response, Schneider pointed out that committees are advisory in nature and all conversation is not required to be included in minutes unless action is to be taken on that decision. She added that the natural free flowing discourse of ideas was similarly not required to be recorded in minutes unless Council-approved action is transacted from that discussion. She specified that her former comment of "being present" meant interacting with people, not being physically present at a meeting. She indicated that there were many other means of obtaining information from a meeting and explained that the absent minutes referred to previously by Greeson likely emanated from a committee where the members themselves produce the minutes which had gotten backlogged. She stated that the simple solution to this problem would be to call staff to ask for the minutes. She called attention to the fact that generally committee meeting minutes were informative and promptly posted.

Stone challenged Schneider's statement made earlier that he had said committee members could simply be replaced. Schneider responded that this statement was reported to her from other sources, but that she did not hear it directly from him.

Stone asked Schneider if she believed that standardized best practice was about distrust. In response, Schneider referred to a phone call with Stone during which he had said that he wanted to see and hear who says what at a meeting. She explained that if she were a committee chairperson and had learned of what was said, she would feel uncomfortable and deem it inappropriate because of his absence from the meeting and his noninvolvement in the actual discussion at the meeting.

Stone cited a joint statement released in the past by the North Carolina League of Municipalities (NCLM) and the State Legislature which stated that the "public's right to hear and see and know public business is of the utmost importance." He pointed out that all Town committees are governed by the NC Open Meeting Laws and, as such, must maintain full and accurate minutes of the sessions when the public meets with a general account so that any individual not in attendance may have a reasonable understanding of what transpired during that session. He noted that without encumbering committees to produce such written minutes, he could instead obtain recordings of meetings to listen to at his leisure and gain a greater understanding of what was discussed. He stated that recordings would enable an individual to listen to the thought processes and discussions which occur during meetings and prevent misunderstandings gained through rumors or inaccurately repeated information. Stone stressed that citizens would prefer their elected officials to be as informed as possible, and that while he cannot attend every meeting in person, he could easily access their recordings. He pointed out that Town records indicated that some discussions were not being recorded in minutes and many committees take months to post their minutes. He supported free discourse of ideas at meetings but emphasized that such discussions are public information and should be made available to all citizens for their greater understanding of government business. He emphasized that his comments were not meant as criticisms of committees.

Schneider pointed out that minutes are not approved immediately. She explained that one month's minutes would be approved at the next month's meeting, and sometimes committees skip months of meetings before reconvening. She clarified that rumors had not been mentioned as a source for misinterpretation, but that many find it difficult to understand the context of working group committees because their discussions span several topics, issues, and time, and information is often referred to in shorthand. She added that the joint statement from the NCLM and State Legislature cited by Stone did not allude to the recording of every aspect of every discussion. Instead, she explained, the statement allowed for a recording in the minutes of decisions and points of action.

Kinneman stated that his goal was to make government available to everyone regardless of personal circumstances. He pointed out that citizens did not have the option to attend meetings remotely 15 years ago and approved written minutes were the only option for garnering information about government business. He noted that reading minutes could lead to various interpretations that watching or listening to conversations would prevent. He indicated that recordings would only

be retained until the official written minutes were generated from the recordings. Kinneman stressed that making meetings more accessible would attract a wider audience including younger individuals and he considered this to be a path toward expanding citizen participation in the Town's business.

Schneider expressed her understanding that recordings could only be destroyed with action from Council. Assistant Town Manager/Town Clerk Sandra Smith affirmed this understanding. Schneider added that Council had previously approved and established an annual disposition of certain approved records, and regularly removing video recordings would require monthly Council action. Kinneman suggested that livestreams of only the more recent meetings could be made available to the public, and Schneider noted that the only method of posting livestreams was through social media platforms. Smith explained that the Town's website was unable to manage and store large video files such as livestreams of all committee meetings. Kinneman noted that the prevailing technological issues were surmountable and should be explored for resolution. He added that virtual meetings where individuals could interact remotely was a future goal that he would like to achieve.

Stone stated that he had prepared two motions to act on this issue. The first motion involved audio recording of all committees, and the second motion involved the continuation of recordings of committees who have adopted it as a standard practice and livestreaming meetings without recording the livestreams. He noted that recording the livestreams could be added at a later time. He added that he would be open to setting a policy to approve monthly minutes along with monthly deletion of the prior month's recordings. Kinneman reinforced the suggestion to livestream meetings without recordings on a trial basis and to reconsider recording the livestreams later. Schneider reminded Council that legal exceptions on recordings existed with statutory committees such as P&Z and HPC. Town Attorney Michael Thomas explained that P&Z, HPC, and BOA were legal agencies of the Town governed by statute, and that these agencies had separate and independent obligations which regulate their procedures. Thomas noted that Council had no purview in regulating those particular boards and that they should be removed from the discussion of recordings. Kinneman commented that the discussion did not involve changing those boards' procedural behavior. He said that the discussion instead involved streaming the meetings live to provide the public with opportunities to observe the meetings. Schneider pointed out that opening HPC procedures to the public would statutorily permit applicants to also attend HPC procedures remotely. Thomas expressed concern with requiring the livestreaming of statutory committees specifically when reviewing quasi-judicial cases as it created an avenue for others not involved in the case to participate in the proceedings. Kinneman noted that participation in livestreamed meetings would not be allowed, and Town Manager Bill Bruce commented that the use of the Zoom platform implied participation of viewers. Kinneman responded that Zoom could be set up so that participants could only view the meeting without interacting in it. He suggested further investigation of Zoom meeting capabilities be taken on by staff. Schneider reminded Council that many other means of discovering what occurred in meetings were available to the public.

Greeson suggested delaying further discussion on recording committee meetings to the Council meeting in January 2025.

Councilman Mike Stone made a motion to continue the standard practice of audio recordings of Town committee meetings and other public meetings and livestream without recording all Town committee meetings and other public meetings while staff explored the ramifications of livestreams, and for the practice of recordings in both manners to be effective January 2, 2025. The motion failed for lack of a second motion.

Councilman Michael Greeson made a motion to continue the discussion of recording Town committee meetings to include input from the Town Attorney to the meeting on January 2, 2025. Mayor Jim Kinneman seconded the motion.

Schneider recalled from the previous meeting that Council was tasked to approach committees for their input on the issue. She noted that non-statutory committees noted disfavor of being recorded, and she questioned why these opinions were not being considered during the present discussion of recording meetings. While acknowledging the need for transparency, she reiterated the difficulty inherent in comprehending the context of discussions held by working groups during their meetings. Kinneman pointed out that Greeson's motion did take the committees' opinions into consideration by requesting a delay of further discussion to pursue additional feedback from residents. Stone countered Schneider's assertion of Council not listening to committee members with Council not listening to citizens. Kinneman reiterated the need to pursue further discussions with more residents. Harton added the need to further explore Zoom platform capabilities.

The motion passed 3-2 with Councilwoman Ann Schneider and Councilman Jim Harton voting against the motion.

11. MONTHLY FINANCIAL UPDATE

Finance Officer Sam Anders reported normal financial transactions for October. He noted that Guilford County was automating the delivery of tax savings to municipalities.

Kinneman asked if the credit card tap feature for square payments had been added to the square app. Smith replied that she was uncertain but that she would follow up to verify the status of the tap feature.

Stone asked if a regulatory deadline existed for the annual financial audit. Anders replied that the former date of October 25 had been relaxed by the State and that the Town would be in compliance with any deadlines.

Councilman Jim Harton made a motion to approve the financial report as presented by the Finance Officer, and Councilwoman Ann Schneider seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

12. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Finance Committee

No report

B. Water Advisory Committee

No report

C. Historic Preservation Commission

Barbara Engel reported on the continuance of consideration of the demolition of the H.C. Gardner house at 2204 Oak Ridge Road, which is a historical contributing structure, to the November meeting. She reported that the Historical Oak Ridge Book had been edited twice and would be proofread next.

D. Planning & Zoning Board

No report

E. Mountains-to-Sea-Trail Committee

Chair Anne Steele reported on the minor repair needs at the Headwaters Trail and on the status of the three Eagle Scout projects at Carriage Cove. She announced a workday at Carriage Cove scheduled for the following Saturday.

F. Conservation Easement Committee

Chair Stephanie Ferrell reported on the status of two CORE grants and on the award granted by the Piedmont Land Conservancy for the purchase of property for a conservation easement.

G. Special Events Committee

Chair Patti Dmuchowski reported that Phase One of the Veterans Honor Green project was nearing completion. She noted that a second punch list had been issued to the contractor. She added that preparations were underway for Light Up the Night, which is scheduled on December 7.

H. Tree Committee

Co-Chair Roy Nydorf reported on the status of the Treasure Tree project, indicating that eight new species of trees would be added to the collection.

I. Parks & Recreation Advisory Board

Co-Chair Adrian Eckenrod reported on approved projects at the park. He provided an update on the park security cameras and noted that issues regarding the Farmhouse Community Center Policy and Fee Schedule discussed previously that

evening by Council would be shared with the Board at its next meeting for reconsideration.

12. COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION REPORTS

Kinneman recommended that Community Organization Reports be removed from the agenda and representatives of the organizations instead be invited to provide their reports during the earlier Public Comments portion of the meeting. He noted that the earlier time slot for presentation could encourage better attendance by these organizations. Schneider noted that the organizations had in the past been invited to present during Public Comments by the Town Clerk. Schneider said she favored keeping their reports on the agenda. Stone agreed with keeping the reports on the agenda and moving that agenda item up to occur after the report from the Oak Ridge Fire Department and before the first section of Public Comments. Kinneman suggested giving further consideration to relocating the community organization reports on the agenda.

A. Triad Municipal ABC Board

Jimm Barbery reported earnings of \$45,026 for the third quarter of the year would be distributed to the Town.

B. Oak Ridge Elementary School

No report

C. Oak Ridge Youth Association

No report

D. Oak Ridge Military Academy

No report

14. PUBLIC COMMENTS

- Stephanie Ferrell, 5839 Billet Road, commented on the lack of participation in the voting process by young people who distrust government and who feel unheard by government. She made a comparison with this situation to the issues which have continued to be discussed since March about recording committee meetings. She likened the sense of distrust among young voters to the same sense of distrust felt by actively involved constituents of the Town who had continued to voice their disfavor of being recorded in committee meetings since the matter had first been introduced in March. She questioned Council's disregard of the voices of volunteers most significantly impacted by the matter to seek out more favorable responses from residents who are not as actively involved in the Town.

- Ben Walraven, 5931 Pepper Road, described the cavalier manner in which the meeting agenda was being handled, noting specifically the discussion of the entire Farmhouse Community Center Policy when only the alcohol policy and fee schedule were listed for discussion on the agenda. He asked that Council give specific guidelines to volunteers in its request to revisit the proposed Farmhouse policies. He asked that Council not assume the intentions behind the policies that volunteers had developed. He added that Councils' request for more effective written records and audio-visual reporting of meetings would add time-consuming tasks to staff and volunteers, thereby bloating government business. Walraven questioned that if recordings would not replace minutes, then why should Council require recordings. He cautioned against developing rules, regulations, and fees which would discourage the use of the Farmhouse, thereby making it incapable of paying for itself.
- Adrian Eckenrod, 5679 Timber Trace Way, appreciated the opportunity to serve on the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board.
- Michael Logan, 5202 Rambling Road, Greensboro, reported a joint Guilford County Schools Budget Committee and County Commissioners' meeting on November 13. He encouraged attendance at this meeting as it would not be recorded or televised. He explained that the school system managed the largest budget in the county and participation in its budget meetings would encourage a better understanding of fiduciary matters in the school system. He also commented on traffic issues at schools.

15. COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mayor Pro Tem Mike Stone stated that progress is ugly but progress, nonetheless.

Councilman Jim Harton acknowledged all who attended the meeting and offered his appreciation.

Councilwoman Ann Schneider acknowledged all who attended the meeting and offered her appreciation.

Mayor Jim Kinneman noted the arduous process of making progress and acknowledged that all commentary offered on issues would be considered.

16. CLOSED SESSION

A closed session was held to discuss matters that are within the attorney-client privilege by providing instructions to the town attorney about handling or settling claims, litigations, or other proceedings per N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(3).

Councilwoman Ann Schneider made a motion to go into closed session at 9:57 p.m. and Mayor Pro Tem Mike Stone seconded. The motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Mayor Jim Kinneman made a motion to return to open session at 10:15 p.m. and Councilwoman Ann Schneider seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

17. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Pro Tem Mike Stone made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:15 p.m., and Councilman Michael Greeson seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

Respectfully Submitted:

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

Jim A. Kinneman
Mayor