



**OAK RIDGE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
MARCH 30, 2023 – 7:00 P.M.
OAK RIDGE TOWN HALL**

MINUTES

Members Present

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

Staff Present

Sandra Smith, Asst. Town Mgr./Town Clerk
Michael Thomas, Town Attorney
Sean Taylor, Planning Director
Ashley Royal, Deputy Town Clerk
Sam Anders, Finance Officer

Staff Absent

Bill Bruce, Town Manager

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Ann Schneider called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. She announced that Town Manager Bill Bruce was unable to attend the meeting and expressed appreciation for Assistant Town Manager Sandra Smith for taking on Bruce's duties. She pointed out that the meeting intended for the month of April had been rescheduled to March 30 to avoid conflict with Holy Week.

A. Invocation.

John Garrett offered the invocation.

B. Pledge of Allegiance.

2. APPROVE AGENDA

Mayor Pro Tem Jim Kinneman made a motion to approve the agenda with a minor modification to remove item 7(b) on the Town Manager's Report, and Councilman Spencer Sullivan seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

3. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

Councilman George McClellan moved that the minutes of the March 2, 2023 regular meeting, February 6, 2023 special called meeting, February 15, 2023 special called meeting, and the March 13, 2023 special called meeting be approved, and Councilwoman Martha Pittman seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

4. RESOLUTIONS, PROCLAMATIONS, ANNOUNCEMENTS

Consideration/Approval of Resolution R-2023-08 Opposing Efforts to Weaken Local Zoning.

Mayor Schneider summarized the purpose of the resolution, which is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes, as concern over State House and Senate bills which can overturn the local zoning efforts of its municipalities. She encouraged citizens to write to their state legislators to voice their support if they choose to do so.

Councilwoman Martha Pittman made a motion to approve Resolution R-2023-08, and Councilman George McClellan seconded. The resolution was passed unanimously (5-0).

5. REPORT FROM GUILFORD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Cpl. Miles reported that 80 calls had been received for the month of March resulting in 19 formal case reports. He said that most calls were for Breaking and Enterings of Motor Vehicles. He stressed keeping cars locked and having valuables out of plain view.

6. REPORT FROM OAK RIDGE FIRE DEPARTMENT

None

7. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

A. Consideration/Approval of reappointment of Courtenay Harton to Historic Preservation Commission.

Councilman Spencer Sullivan made a motion to reappoint Courtenay Harton to the Historic Preservation Commission and Councilwoman Martha Pittman seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

B. Consideration/Approval of Destruction of Records Predating 2019.

The item was removed from the agenda and deferred to the May meeting.

C. Consideration/Approval of Resolution R-2023-06 for Addition of Catania Place, Sicily Street, Palermo Trail, and San Marino Court to the N.C. State Maintenance System.

Councilman George McClellan made a motion to approve Resolution R-2023-06 Addition of Catania Place, Sicily Street, Palermo Trail, and San Marino Court in the Bellagio subdivision to the N.C. State Maintenance System, and Councilwoman Martha Pittman seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

D. Consideration/Approval of Contract Addendum to Construction Service Agreement with McGill Associates, P.A.

Smith explained that the addendum is for the construction phase services for Heritage Farm Park and would provide one part-time Construction Field Representative who would be on-site two days per week to oversee the quality and progress of the executed work. The addendum also provides 10 progress meetings, review and recommendations on all contractor pay requests, shop drawings, samples and all other duties stipulated in the contract. If the addendum is approved, a proposed amendment to the Capital Project Ordinance for Heritage Farm Park to include the contract amendment allocating revenues to the unrestricted fund balance will also require approval.

Councilman Spencer Sullivan moved to approve the Contract Addendum to the Construction Service Agreement with McGill Associate, P.A. Councilman Jim Kinneman seconded.

Council discussion:

Schneider said she thought the addendum was reasonable as it constituted less than 3 percent of the overall contract expense. She pointed out that this expense was already budgeted and would be an important safeguard in ensuring the successful progress of the project.

The motion was approved unanimously (5-0).

Councilman Spencer Sullivan moved to adopt Resolution R-2023-04 Amended Capital Project Budget Ordinance to the Town of Oak Ridge, and Councilman Jim Kinneman seconded. The motion was approved unanimously (5-0).

8. NEW BUSINESS

A. Consideration/Approval of bid for Farmhouse Community Center.

Smith referred Council to the resolution for Farmhouse Community Center Bid Award in the packet, along with the bid documents submitted by BAR Construction – the lowest responsible, responsive bidder – and the bid tabulation sheet from the three bids submitted, all of which are hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes.

Councilman George McClellan made a motion to approve Resolution R-2023-07 for the Farmhouse Community Center Bid Award in the amount of \$630,000 to BAR Construction for the renovation of the Farmhouse Community Center including construction of the new addition. He also moved to instruct the Town Manager and Finance Officer to execute the proposed contract with the understanding that the Mayor and Councilman Sullivan will meet with staff and the project architect to identify additional cost savings strategies consistent with the project scope and purpose. If opportunities for additional cost savings are confirmed with BAR Construction, McClellan moved that the savings be codified through the cost reduction change order to the contract. Councilwoman Martha Pittman seconded the motion.

Council discussion:

Councilman McClellan said that 60 percent of those who contacted him were in favor of restoring the farmhouse. He clarified that the project is not a secret but has been under discussion for four years. McClellan said he regretted the confusion with the cost of the project, citing that the cost is nowhere near \$1 million, nor even \$800,000, as others have stated. He mentioned that the costs some were including were from a different project unrelated to the restoration of the historical building. He mentioned several organizations that could be sufficiently accommodated in the space as none routinely have 50 or more attendees. Further, he pointed out that some other facilities may not be suitable as they are closed during December – a time when people often want space to celebrate the holidays. McClellan ended by saying that the Farmhouse Community Center is consistent with the overall plan to allow both residents and non-residents to use Oak Ridge facilities. He said the Oak Ridge Youth Association supports saving the contributing historical structure and to giving it a new use.

Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman pointed out that the cost was not associated with this project until recently, and because of this, it had raised people's attention. He stated that concerns continue to remain on the question of the building's regular use, its cost, and its location. Kinneman said that he is not under the delusion that the town will ever recover funds on any of its projects, however, he approves facilities such as fields, bathrooms, and sidewalks because though they do not pay for themselves financially, they do so in value and use. Kinneman stated that his concern regarding the facility's location is tantamount to placing a playground next to a busy street. He stated that there is no fencing around the building to prevent a child from running into the street after a ball, and the location will encourage a stacking of cars, creating traffic congestion which could flow onto NC 150.

Kinneman cautioned that promoting the building as being in peril is a scare tactic, and that he is not interested in advocating demolishing the building. He repeated that he has no problem with supporting the restoration of the building's exterior. He clarified that grant money directed to the project is taxpayer's money and he wants to treat this money prudently. He did not believe the projected cost and use of the facility is an appropriate use of tax dollars. He said he believed the price of \$630,000 is more cost than its potential payoff. Kinneman said Town Hall has available meeting space, and he also cited several local churches that will rent space to non-church members. He questioned the facility's claimed accommodation for 50 people.

Councilwoman Pittman said of the comments she received, there were slightly more in support of the project than there was against it. She also thanked Kinneman for speaking to the value of the town's park facilities. Pittman noted that the first time she heard anything about the project in 2019, and said that it has gone through the same process as any other major project considered by the town. Based on her own analysis and discussions with both supporters and non-supporters, she summarized the following areas of consideration: cost and funding, the historic district and preservation, and adaptive reuse and site planning.

Pittman said while the cost is high, she noted that commercial construction is more expensive than residential and that the post-COVID grant funding has had an impact on supply and demand. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds have created more construction demand than the contractors can manage, which affects the prices of goods and labor. Although grant money is taxpayer money, Pittman said it is money

sourced outside of the direct taxing authority of Oak Ridge. She explained that when considering the \$380,000 in grant money, the cost of restoring just the structure constitutes 45 percent of the cost. This percentage rises to 58 percent when applied to the cost of construction of the structure and site plan improvements. Pittman went on to say that the use of the structure is something that can be measured but not predicted, and the value of the project cannot be measured as it is a subjective measurement which varies from person to person.

Pittman said she believes that historic preservation and conservation is part of the Town's DNA, therefore saving the farmhouse is important. While not a magnificent structure nor is it famous, it represents an ordinary home on an historic tobacco farm, and it would be a good example to other property owners in the Historic District. Pittman said that if the bid is approved, the exterior will be restored to its original 1930's Craftsman style home with the addition in keeping with the original house, while the interior will be renovated and modernized. Pittman stated that giving the farmhouse an adaptive reuse as a community center multiplies the value of saving it. She believes that there is a demand for a year-round indoor facility. Though Town Hall can provide this, it cannot allow food, nor would it be suitable to host events such as a painting party. She said that the site design working group has worked to create a safe, attractive, and accessible landscape plan for the entrance to the park which will connect sidewalks, while focusing on cost and balancing that with value. Pittman concluded with the assurance that regardless of the outcome of the vote, she was committed to working with all her colleagues.

A citizen present at the meeting spoke out of order and was asked by Mayor Schneider to pose her comments during the Public Comment portion of the meeting. Disruption to the meeting continued which prompted Mayor Schneider to request the citizen to remove herself from the meeting, or to be removed by law enforcement present at the meeting. The citizen ended her comments.

Councilman Sullivan lamented views erroneously expressed as his and chose to speak about how he personally arrived at his opinions on this project. Sullivan stated that discussions about improving this farmhouse site began when he was mayor in 2018. At that time, no plan was developed due to a lifetime tenancy agreement with the house's residents. Once the Town retained full control of the property, Sullivan said that discussion of developing the property and creating a proper entrance to the park began. He agreed that there is merit to preserving the farmhouse as it is a reminder of what was once a tobacco farm and the farmhouse itself is typical of the farmhouses which once dominated this community. He also agreed that the corner where the house sits needs to be brought up to the standards of the rest of the park. He stated that interior demolition and remediation work began as he was rotating off the Council. Sullivan noted that plans were developed after he left, so he was not privy to the details. However, his return to Council afforded him the opportunity to perform due diligence.

Sullivan said that his concern from the start was over the high cost of the architect's estimate. He noted that the original estimate was \$455,000 which, including architect's fees, amounted to \$337 per square foot of what would become a 1,500-square-foot residence. He pointed out that the current formal bid of \$630,000 is 40 percent, or \$175,000, over the original estimate. He calculated the per square foot cost to be \$450 including the architect's fees, a difference he thought was too great to explain simply by saying it was commercial construction, since the project will

use the same construction techniques and materials as residential construction uses. Sullivan compared this estimate to the cost of new residential construction today at \$210 per square foot, deducting the cost of the well, septic tank and lines, and lot cost, none of which is part of the \$630,000 formal bid. He said that the proposed site improvements are essential to the project and cannot be separated from it. Sullivan calculated that the total estimate of the project with the site improvements would be \$861,400, with more costs still to be added. Sullivan summarized that while numbers are objective and quantifiable, determining the value of this project is subjective and emotional, which has resulted in varying opinions. He said that two weeks is not enough time to perform due diligence. Sullivan said perhaps the costs are justifiable, but at this time he could not reconcile the cost, nor could he see the value in that number. He expressed that without being able to do that, he would not compromise his principles and vote for this or any project the Town might undertake.

Mayor Schneider thanked all who sent in emails, at least 37 of which were in support of the project, more than twice the number of those in opposition. She clarified that this is not a referendum, but a Council decision about a thoughtful, rational project developed over four years which involved residents at every step. Schneider said that resident input began in 2019 with a survey conducted by McGill & Associates which revealed nearly 100 percent of respondents were in favor of various types of public use of the structure. Schneider said that Town staff often receives requests from citizens about an indoor venue to host events. Schneider said that this all led to a unanimous decision by Town Council to hire Hill Studios to design a renovation of the farmhouse while preserving its historic structure.

Schneider pointed out that inflation has put pressure on construction and labor costs. She said building professionals had told her that proposed costs were reasonable and that it would not be cheaper to demolish the structure and build a replacement. For comparison, Schneider said the cost for a simple 1,000-square-foot restroom building at the new park is currently \$600,000. Regarding site improvements, Schneider said that the parking lot, estimated at \$30,000, was the only improvement immediately attributable and the rest of the improvements could be phased. She said that she is committed to working with Councilman Sullivan and BAR Construction to find cost savings. Schneider said that the \$380,000 in grant money would cover over half of the cost of the project, and the building is currently vulnerable to natural elements with its interior having been gutted over three years ago. She noted that the cost to restore just the exterior would likely exceed \$250,000, since all the exterior walls would need to be restored, a new foundation poured, all of doors and windows replaced, and so on. If that were done, the structure would not comply with commercial code requirements and could not even be used for storage, and she questioned spending money on a project that would not benefit residents. She stated that using volunteer labor to cut costs is not consistent with how towns must bid out for projects according to state statutes, and that builders cannot adequately oversee unskilled volunteer help.

Schneider said that this vernacular, everyday structure is as important as the more well-known structures in town and it tells a different, but just as important story of the town's rural heritage. Schneider questioned how the town can be committed to developing Heritage Farm Park and to promoting Historic Heritage Grants for historic preservation if it is not similarly dedicated to preserving the only historic structure the town owns. She concluded with a description of the town's vision that

values its rural historical roots while investing in a forward-looking Village Feel infrastructure that welcomes all visitors to our uniquely livable small town.

Further discussion:

Councilman McClellan addressed the questions surrounding ARPA funds from Guilford County and whether they could be used for different projects if this project is not approved. McClellan clarified that the County ARPA funds are used for specific, designated projects and cannot be used for other purposes. He expressed gratitude to the State for the \$75,000 grant.

Councilman Kinneman mentioned that at least one County Commissioner had posed the possibility of being able to redesignate County ARPA funds, and said that the County had a wide range of authority over how to distribute funds. Kinneman also pointed out that there are plans for two parking lots – one adjacent to the house and the other further up the road, and that the cost for landscaping is unknown. He said that the bid should have been at the same time as the landscaping so that the total cost could be ascertained. Kinneman advocated delaying the decision in order to collect more input and to allow Councilman Sullivan to perform more due diligence. Kinneman said that he understood the frustration of those attending at the meeting, but he encouraged citizens to speak during the allocated times and to respect the process of the meeting.

Councilwoman Pittman mentioned that demolition through neglect of the structure was a reality and that the project should move forward.

Councilman Sullivan agreed that the project is complex and costs were unknown until two weeks prior to the meeting. He said he thought that the Council had five different opinions with different reasons to approve or disapprove of the project. He advocated for time to speak with the project architect, and he asked all involved to be respectful when speaking during the Public Comments.

With no further discussion the motion was passed by a 3-2 vote (Schneider, Pittman and McClellan for, and Kinneman and Sullivan voting in opposition).

B. Consideration/Approval of scope of work for \$75,000 N.C. State Community Infrastructure Fund Grant for Farmhouse Community Center.

Smith explained that the proposed scope of work is for a SCIF (State Capital Infrastructure Fund) Grant of \$75,000 to be applied towards construction and renovation of the Farmhouse Community Center.

Mayor Schneider added that the grant had previously been awarded by State Representative John Faircloth and designated to the Farmhouse Community Center. She explained that because of the state's grant monitoring office, it is required that the scope of work be codified.

Councilwoman Pittman made a motion to approve the proposed scope of work to apply the \$75,000 SCIF Grant money to the construction and renovation of the Farmhouse Community Center. Councilman McClellan seconded the motion.

Council discussion:

Kinneman stated that he will not act as an obstructionist now that the project has been approved. He noted that the approval of the grant was necessary to move the project forward successfully, and that he would continue to raise objections, ask questions and make suggestions on the project.

Schneider, McClellan and Pittman acknowledged Kinneman's stance and expressed gratitude.

The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

C. Consideration/Approval of site plan application to Planning & Zoning Board and COA application to Historic Preservation Commission for site plan/graphic for Town water tower.

Smith explained that the site plan was developed by The Wooten Company (consultant) with assistance from a working group consisting of the town manager, mayor, Councilman Sullivan and Jim Harton, chair of Water Advisory Committee. She said that both Wooten and the working group have endorsed the location, style, and capacity of the water tower. Smith added that the water tower graphic was developed by local graphic designer Carol Key. With Council's approval, Smith said that the site plan will proceed to review by the Planning & Zoning Board and both the site plan and graphics will be reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission.

Council discussion:

Councilman Sullivan emphasized that the plans being discussed are preliminary and do not have any technical details. He said that the Water Advisory Committee will have a full evaluation of the more detailed site plan later. He pointed out that this motion is not to approve the project, but to endorse plans for them to proceed to the Planning & Zoning Board and the Historic Preservation Commission for approval.

Councilwoman Pittman expressed that she was unsure how she would feel about the water tower, as it would be a big change visually. She expressed that it would be something that she would become accustomed to seeing, and said that she had no issues with the site plan as proposed.

Councilman Kinneman wanted to ensure that the tower's maintenance costs would be clear when the project is put out to bid. He also asked for the existing relevant sidewalks to be properly located so as not to encourage jaywalking across the road.

Councilman McClellan said that the project is a great step forward especially as it impacts fire suppression. He believed that this could create a reduction in some home insurance rates.

Mayor Schneider expressed that the goal was to have the water tower blend in with the colors of nature and the colors of Historic District. She described the water tower location behind Town Hall and said that it would stand in an enclosed area that would be surrounded by landscaping. She mentioned that the graphic design is simple. Schneider said that she believes the water tower will be a symbol of progress and a landmark in the municipal core. She elaborated that grant money in the

amount of \$1.1 million has been granted to pay for the project in addition to a portion of the County ARPA grant of \$3.265 million. She said that the approval of the site plan was the first step in the permitting process.

The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

9. PUBLIC COMMENTS

- Diane Underwood, 6315 Lisa Ln., asked if a vote would be held to decide if the Farmhouse would be refurbished. Mayor Schneider explained that protocol designates this session for comments, not for questions. She invited citizens to contact any member of Council or staff with questions.
- Terry Hammond, 1815 Oak Ridge Rd., thanked Council members for approving the Farmhouse project. Hammond said that the Guilford County Historic Preservation Commission, of which she is a member, endorsed the project as a smart investment. She said that the project will employ a local construction company and the money will stay in the community. She also noted that the project's cost should not be compared with residential construction, but should be compared to commercial construction cost, which are very high.
- Roy Nydorf, 1815 Oak Ridge Rd., thanked Council members for their wisdom and thoughtful conversation.
- Ben Walraven, 5931 Pepper Rd., thanked Council members for their transparency and the diligent approach they took to resolving the Farmhouse issue. He said that citizens of Oak Ridge had voted to put these Council members in office. Walraven declared his support for the community center. He said that he read the town's strategic plan, focusing on the vision statement and the growth & development, recreation, and preservation areas, and believed that the project is compatible with the plan. He said that the renovation is elegant and well thought out.
- Carl Leybourne, 8514 Rosedale Dr., said that it would have been more prudent to defer the decision on the community center until the financial aspects of the project are more fully understood. He appreciated that the project had been worked on for four years, but lamented that the financial cost had only been acquired two weeks before the meeting. Leybourne said that most citizens do not get involved in understanding historical preservation, but they do focus on how the Town's finances are managed. Leybourne said that taking a functionally obsolescent residential property and repurposing it for undefined commercial use was an excuse to use a historical project that may not be consistent with the Town's long-term strategic plan. He said that in researching how other towns of the same scale conduct projects, such as the project to lay water pipes from Kernersville, he came to understand who are stewards of the Town's money and thereby worthy of his vote. He believed that the town would end up having a dangerous and expensive space that will not meet the Town's long-term needs.
- Holly Stewart, 1686 Deer Run Ct., thanked Council for its thoughtfulness and care in planning for the community. She stated that she had attended Council meetings in other towns, and none were as collaborative or collegial as this Council. She stressed

that she moved to Oak Ridge for specific reasons, which are historic preservation, green space, and community purpose. She noted that costs are important to consider, which they are very high right now. Stewart said she believed that to allow the house to suffer from neglect is not OK, but the community center could give the Town a sense of purpose and place and be a capstone project for the community.

- Roger Howerton, 2106 Oak Ridge Rd., recognized the difficulty in making the decision to reuse the farmhouse as a community center. He elaborated on the memories he had of the house, believing it had been built in the early 1900s. Howerton noted that he knew five of the families who had lived in that house and farmed that property. He recalled that growing up, 90 percent of the area consisted of farms raising tobacco, wheat, and corn. Today, he said, things have changed, and the Town has gone in a different direction. Howerton said he realized he has memories of the area that many at the meeting do not, and he urged Council members to renovate the property.
- Phyllis Clodfelter, 6707 Brookbank Rd., thanked the Council for their hard work in serving the town. Clodfelter recounted the history of Oak Ridge United Methodist Church to give everyone an understanding of Oak Ridge's character. She said that based on documents by Edna Linville, church historian, the first ORUMC was built in 1845 where the current cemetery stands. The second church was built in 1903 on the grounds of Oak Ridge Military Academy, however this structure succumbed to fire in 1914. The church was then rebuilt and today is Linville Chapel. Clodfelter noted that in 1945, the Oak Ridge Easter Horse Show was created to help raise funds to build a bigger church. The small community of 500 people who were mostly farmers, she said, had a vision for Oak Ridge as a close-knit community. Clodfelter said the farmhouse, too, has a story, and it is important to share the history, especially with the young families in Oak Ridge.
- Marsha McClenny, 8409 Linville Oaks Dr., stated that ARPA funds are supposed to be used for COVID relief and listed various intended uses such as replacing lost public sector revenue due to the pandemic. McClenny said that she could not see what renovating an old house had to do with COVID relief. She said the Council was not being transparent about the cost of the project and wanted to know what the total cost including the interior demolition of the house four years ago and the proposed furnishing of the center. McClenny questioned the value of preserving history through the project when the town will not bring back the Easter Horse Show.
- Mike Kimel, 5601 Tanyard Ct., appreciated the discernment in discussions about the Farmhouse. He believed that the house gives the Town an opportunity to understand another aspect of the town's history as it represents the life of common tenant farmers. He noted that many more prominent families and their homes are marked throughout the Town, but Oak Ridge is made of common people, and the gable front craftsman style Redmon house is one of the last of its kind. Kimel mentioned that similarly, the Old Union Cemetery on East Harrel Rd. shows markers for two prominent families, the Lowreys and Parrishes, but there are scores of vertical markings which may represent common people as well as freed African Americans who did not have the money to purchase headstones.

- Patti Dmuchowski, 7320 Hidden View Dr., voiced her support of the Farmhouse project. Dmuchowski stated that one of the reasons she chose to move to Oak Ridge is because the Town understands history and is involved with its community. She expressed concern for the mean-spirited rhetoric which took place over social media platforms, bashing council members and volunteers for having differing views. As a volunteer for over five years, Dmuchowski pointed out that volunteers give of their own time to serve the community, and she urged those who do not like what goes on in the Town to become involved. She said everyone should be able to voice their opinions without fear of being criticized.
- Mike Stone, 8112 Hunting Cog Rd., said that the Council should have suspended its rules to allow citizens to comment on the Farmhouse project before taking a vote. He said that citizens have known about the cost of the project for only two weeks. He also mentioned that he had never had the experience of a mayor asking law enforcement to remove a citizen from a meeting because they were upset. Stone referenced the notion of disappearing farmland by pointing to the 148 acres of farmland which the town turned into a town park. Stone also referred to a survey, which he said the Council had ignored, of 190 people which resulted in 80 percent of these comments in opposition to the project. He said that if the survey conducted by McGill had noted the cost of the project, the responses would have been different from what was collected. Stone said that the increase in cost due to inflation should be a sign to stop pursuing the project. He noted that the restoration of Ai Church was accomplished with the assistance of volunteers and private money.
- Andy Michaels, 8216 Hunting Cog Rd., voiced his opposition to the Farmhouse project when it was first introduced with a cost of \$400,000, as well as now at a cost of \$800,000. He urged Council to allow people the ability to comment on the project, and asked for a delay in voting for a month while citizens considered the financials.
- Loretta Gallagher, 8353 West Harrell Rd., stated that this was her first time attending a Town Council meeting and that she felt insulted by the comments made about people who do not attend meetings. She noted that people should be allowed to be heard before a vote is cast. Gallagher said that she is not on social media, and therefore not privy to any commentary conducted on these platforms. She stated that she was not in favor of the project due to its high cost. Gallagher also voiced concern about the agenda item regarding the destruction of records predating 2019. She asked if the records slated for discussion are saved under a different format should access to the information be needed later. She said that accessibility to the records was needed. Asst. Town Manager Sandra Smith invited Gallagher to contact her to discuss her questions and concerns. Gallagher suggested storing these records in a closet at Redmon House.
- Debbie Shoenfeld, 8501 San Siro Farm Ct., thanked the Council for its support of the Farmhouse project. She said that people had ample opportunity to discuss the project prior to this meeting. Shoenfeld said she understood the cost of the project, and noted that the cost of constructing Heritage Farm Park was also higher than anticipated due to rising construction costs. Shoenfeld concluded that the Farmhouse project was appropriate for the Town as it fulfills a need other than for playground or athletic activities.

Councilman McClellan requested and was granted a 5-minute recess. Meeting resumed at 9:03 p.m.

10. MONTHLY FINANCIAL UPDATE

Finance Officer Sam Anders stated that the financial report, which had not been prepared because the month had not yet ended, will be distributed when completed.

Anders stated that the LGC application process was being completed, work was continuing on the Town's potential water system, and the budget for FY 2023/24 was being drafted. He noted that in accordance with the Council's actions, the loan for the Whitaker/Heritage Farm Park property had been paid off, resulting in a savings of \$125,500 in future interest payments.

Councilman George McClellan made a motion to accept the financial report as presented, and Councilman Jim Kinneman seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

11. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Finance Committee.

Chair John Jenkins reported that the committee has met twice since the last Council meeting. At the first meeting, the committee reviewed each line item of the current fiscal year budget and reported that it looks good, coming slightly under budget. The second meeting focused on the next fiscal year's projected operational budget. He said that the committee will meet again the following week to discuss the capital budget. Jenkins invited the public to attend their open meetings.

B. Water Advisory Committee.

No report

C. Historic Preservation Commission.

Chair Debbie Shoenfeld reported that the Commission did not meet in March. She said that members met in design review meetings to discuss the water tower graphics. She noted that the Commissions FY2023/24 budget has submitted, Historic Heritage Grant applications are due April 14, and the Oak Ridge history book schedule is being updated.

D. Planning & Zoning Board.

The board did not meet in the month of March.

E. Mountains-to-Sea Trail Committee.

Chair Anne Steele reported that the committee hosted trail workdays which focused on the loop through Carriage Cove and the Pemberly Estate development. She said that great progress was being made on the trail. Steele noted that the committee's

next workday is April 26 and that they will be hosting a guided hike of the Headwaters Trail in honor of NC's Year of the Trail.

F. Conservation Easement Committee.

No report

G. Special Events Committee.

Chair Patti Dmuchowski reported that almost \$8,000 has been raised during the first quarter of this year for the Veteran's Honor Green. She stated that a Memorial Day observance is scheduled for May 29 at 10 a.m. at the park amphitheater, the kids' bike parade on July 4 will take place on the sidewalks in the front of the park, and the Light Up the Night event will add more wooden stars to commemorate the town's 25th anniversary. Lastly, she mentioned that the Ttown's 25th anniversary will be celebrated on January 24, 2024, at Oak Ridge United Methodist Church.

H. Tree Committee.

No report

I. Parks & Recreation Advisory Board.

Co-Chair John Garrett reported that the committee approved the Northwest Pastors Association to hold a National Day of Prayer ceremony on May 4 at the park. He added that three potential frozen treat vendors were interviewed to be the vendors for the 2023 season. Scoop Zone was awarded the exclusive rights.

12. COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION REPORTS

A. Oak Ridge Elementary School.

Principal Penny Loschin thanked the Council for its continued support of the school. She acknowledged the work of Jim Smith as he served as interim principal in her absence. Loschin reported that student-led conferences were held with over 30 organizations in a summer expo, the PTO has provided picnic tables, trash cans and a walking track for the school, and the graduating fifth grade class gifted the school with a vinyl covering for windows near the front entrance which will improve the school's security. She noted that Kindergarten night is scheduled on April 27 and the spring STEM night is scheduled directly afterwards.

B. Oak Ridge Youth Association.

Randy Collins thanked the Council for its continued support. He said ORYA's website had information on its scholarship program and on the importance of team sports. Collins said that their current season involves lacrosse and rugby.

C. Oak Ridge Military Academy.

No report

13. PUBLIC COMMENTS

- Carl Leybourne, 8514 Rosedale Dr., expressed his appreciation for members of Council and the difficulties of their position. Leybourne advised that to remain credible as public servants, Council members should be interested in hearing the input of people who come to their public meetings. He asked why Council could not make a simple change and place Public Comments before a vote was taken on the Farmhouse project. He stated that even if the vote were predetermined, citizens would at least have the emotional satisfaction of having been heard. He urged flexibility in Council procedures, saying that most people do not understand the process. Leybourne concluded by asking that people not be pushed way or threatened with removal by law enforcement for being emotional.
- Phyllis Anders, 1837 Oak Ridge Rd., expressed her appreciation of Council members for their service. She said that she was glad the “old house” was being given a second chance, and she believed that it would be a great thing for the community and a much-needed addition to the park. She said that the Farmhouse Community Center will be just as important as the playgrounds as it will be useful to people of all ages.
- Caroline Ruch, 1976 Beeson Rd., expressed her support for the Farmhouse Community Center project. She recognized that the job of Council members is not easy. She stressed that she had not been active in the community for many years, despite having lived here since 1995. Becoming involved, she said, improves greater understanding of processes. She said the Farmhouse project had been discussed since 2019 and was publicized in the Northwest Observer, in social media, and on the Town’s website. She said that the house is an amazing structure which represents everything that Mr. Howerton mentioned earlier.

14. COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Sullivan thanked everyone for expressing their opinions about the Farmhouse project, both for and against. He said that in retrospect, it is not often that the Council arrives at a 3-to-2 vote, but that this reflects the depth of the research, knowledge and discussion that took place. Sullivan noted that he had always supported doing something on that corner of the park and with the house. He stated that he was disappointed at the notion being shared that the house might be demolished. Sullivan said that he supported delaying this decision and moving Public Comments before voting, though this is a move decided by the mayor. He emphasized that the Council would work together, save money where possible, and move forward with the Farmhouse project.

Councilwoman Pittman stressed that she was talked out and wished everyone a “Happy Spring.”

Councilman Kinneman pointed to the passion on both sides of the discussion about the Farmhouse project and that ill manner was displayed on both sides. He pointed out that when people speak passionately or excitedly on a topic, it can come across as an attack, and he advised caution and mindfulness when speaking. Kinneman

admitted that he does not take offense to these comments as it is a part of his job as councilman to listen to spirited debate.

Councilman McClellan stressed that he and the Council members listen to all comments expressed and that he responds to every email he receives. He pointed out that despite having conflicting discussions, everyone can remain friends.

Mayor Schneider expressed her gratitude to her fellow Council members. She explained the necessity of maintaining calm at meetings so as not to devolve into uncivil behavior. She apologized if some felt she had been heavy handed. Schneider encouraged anyone with questions about ARPA funds to direct them to staff members as they are acquainted with the broad guidelines.

15. ADJOURNMENT

Councilman Jim Kinneman moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:34 p.m., and Councilman George McClellan seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

Respectfully Submitted:

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

Ann K. Schneider
Mayor