



**OAK RIDGE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING  
MAY 4, 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**

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

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Ann Schneider called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**A. Invocation.**

Pastor Mike Carr, Oak Ridge United Methodist Church, offered the invocation.

**B. Pledge of Allegiance.**

**2. APPROVE AGENDA**

*Mayor Pro Tem Jim Kinneman made a motion to approve the agenda, and Councilman George McClellan seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).*

**3. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES**

*Councilwoman Martha Pittman made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 30, 2023, regular meeting, and Councilman Spencer Sullivan seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).*

**4. RESOLUTIONS, PROCLAMATIONS, ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Mayor Schneider read a proclamation designating Thursday, May 4, 2023, as A Day of Prayer in Oak Ridge, North Carolina which is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes.

Councilwoman Pittman recognized the services of Assistant Town Manager/Town Clerk Sandra Smith, Deputy Town Clerk Ashley Royal and Office Assistant Genevieve

Geib and read a proclamation acknowledging the week of April 30 through May 6, 2023, as the 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Professional Municipal Clerks Week. The proclamation is incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes.

**5. REPORT FROM GUILFORD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE**

None

**6. REPORT FROM OAK RIDGE FIRE DEPARTMENT**

Assistant Fire Chief Sam Anders reported a 25 percent increase in calls in 2022 from 2021, with continued activity in 2023. He reported that Guilford County Emergency Medical Services are receiving more support from local fire departments with lower-grade medical calls. Anders asked for extra caution when conducting open burns of yard debris as the month of May tends to experience unstable weather patterns. He encouraged citizens to obtain permits from NC Forestry Service and to have water and tools on hand to maintain control burns. Anders also mentioned that the fire department has mailbox numbers for sale to aid with emergency response.

**7. PUBLIC HEARING**

**Rezoning Case # RZ-23-01: AG to CZ-RS-40:** The property is located at 1338 Forsyth Road, on the south side of Forsyth Road approximately 630 feet east of the intersection of Forsyth Road and Autumn Harvest Drive, in Oak Ridge Township. It is Guilford County Tax Parcel #168307 and consists of approximately 19.57 acres, located in the Oak Ridge Extra-territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) and Greensboro (WS-III) Watershed. The property is owned by the Duggins Family Trust (Debra Duggins and Van Duggins, Trustees).

Planning Director Sean Taylor read the property description and presented the staff report, which is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the record.

Taylor stated that the Land Solutions representative present was Chris Rohrer and not Bill Greco, as noted in the report.

Taylor indicated that both the Town and the applicant had notified all property owners within 500 feet of the subject's property of the rezoning request.

Taylor described the existing use of the property as agricultural, as it has been forested, and stated that its tract size is 19.57 acres. As part of the development conditions, lost tree coverage will be replaced with five trees per building lot with a caliper of 2½ inches. He described the property as located in the Greensboro General Watershed, under no overlay district, with no flood plains and a small perennial stream on the southwest boundary. Public water is available and under Town ordinance, the property will be required to connect to public water if feasible and if within 300 feet of the line. He further stated that public septic is not available. Any tree conservation will be determined during the subdivision process. He stated that site access to the property will be off Forsyth Road and connect directly to Oak Ridge Road where there is an annual average daily traffic count of 5,900 at the

intersection of Oak Ridge Road and Harvest Ridge Road. He stated that neither sidewalks nor a Traffic Impact Study are required by Town ordinance, but NCDOT may require a study be conducted during the subdivision process. Taylor summarized that the request meets Objective 1.2 of the Future Land Use Plan and complies with Figure 3.1 of the Comprehensive Pedestrian Transportation Plan. Taylor reported that staff recommends approval of the rezoning application.

Mayor Schneider opened the public hearing.

*Proponents:*

Chris Rohrer, Land Solutions Land Surveying, Design and Planning, 1616 NC 68 North, stated that his company has been working with the applicant on the request to rezone the property from AG to CZ-RS-40. He said that the request is consistent with the Town's current Land Use Plan, which designates the area as residential. He stated that the property is also consistent with other properties in the area, those properties being Harvest Ridge to the north, LaBella to the east, and Eden Bridge and Eden Terrace to the south. Rohrer stated that the community outreach consisted of mailings to property owners within 500 feet of the subject's property. He said that responses received were general questions and none spoke in opposition to the request. Rohrer summarized that along with the Planning Board's approval, he believed that the request to rezone is reasonable and consistent with other like properties.

*Opponents:*

Frank Carroll, 1389 Forsyth Road, wanted clarification on the source of water for this development. He expressed concern that development of the area would begin before the water connection is determined. Additionally, Carroll stressed concern over the blind curve that is the currently the only entrance into the property. He wanted to know if alternative access to the property would be developed. Lastly, Carroll mentioned that his mother-in-law owned the property across from this property and she did not receive any notification of its rezoning request; he requested a copy of what was mailed out.

*Rebuttal in support of the request:*

Rohrer stated that the request to rezone is the first step in the process of developing the property. Connection to public water would be obtained if feasible. If not, then individual wells would be drilled. Rohrer stated that per Town ordinance, this tract would be connected to the Town water system if it is a development of 30 or more homes. Regarding the property entrance, Rohrer stated that there is a limited area to work with, however NCDOT would need to grant a driveway permit and would be responsible for reviewing the entrance for improvements or changes.

*Rebuttal in opposition to the request:*

None.

Mayor Schneider closed the public hearing.

*Council discussion:*

Taylor added that the request to rezone was approved unanimously (7-0) by the Planning & Zoning Board in its last meeting.

Councilman Jim Kinneman asked if this property were in the Town Extra-territorial Jurisdiction. Taylor answered yes.

Councilman George McClellan asked if the property had been offered the opportunity to be annexed into the Town of Oak Ridge, and Taylor answered yes.

Councilwoman Martha Pittman referred to the replacement of tree coverage at 5 trees per building lot. She asked how many lots would be on the property. Rohrer responded that based on the shape of the lot, it was determined that there could be up to 16 lots.

*Councilwoman Pittman made a motion to approve the proposed zoning amendment #RZ-23-01 from AG to CZ-RS-40, based on its consistency with the Town's adopted comprehensive land use plan and based on the Planning Board's findings of consistency, which are adopted by reference. Further, the proposed zoning amendment is deemed reasonable based on the findings of the staff report that it is reasonable, which are adopted by reference. And lastly that the proposed zoning amendment is deemed in the public interest based on the findings of the staff report that it is in the public interest, which is adopted by reference. Councilman McClellan seconded the motion.*

Councilman Kinneman noted that it is not unusual that a zoning request be made before a water source is determined. He said he was concerned about the missed outreach to the property owner across from this property. Rohrer replied that his company handled the mailings, and said he was uncertain why this individual did not receive a letter. He did render a copy to Carroll for the owner's review.

Mayor Schneider intoned that connection to the municipal water system was at this point premature, but that the property would be invited to connect once it is feasible. She expressed trust in the NCDOT's efforts to manage reliable and safe roadways through the property.

*The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).*

## **8. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT**

- **Consideration/Approval of matching Veterans Honor Green donation raised January-March 2023 and moving donations and Town match to the Veterans Honor Green Restricted Fund.**

Assistant Town Manager/Town Clerk Sandra Smith stated that \$7,845.00 was raised in the first quarter of 2023. She asked that a matching sum of \$7,845.00 be taken from the Small-Town Development Grant from the State, and that both sums be moved to the Veterans Honor Green Restricted Fund, bringing it to a total balance of \$184,932.24.

*Councilman McClellan moved to approve the matching fund and to move both the money raised with its match to the Veterans Honor Green Restricted Fund. Councilwoman Pittman seconded the motion.*

Councilman Kinneman asked how much money remains in the State's Small Town Development grant. Smith responded that it was \$29,783.38.

Mayor Schneider stressed that all money in this restricted fund cannot be used for any project other than the Veterans Honor Green.

*The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).*

- **Consideration/Approval of Destruction of Records Predating 2019.**

Smith noted that this request was continued from the last Council meeting. Since then, she had spoken with two citizens who had expressed concern regarding the destruction of records and felt these concerns were sufficiently addressed. She explained that Town Hall is the repository for all Town records. She noted that these records have been examined and deemed to be of no further value and thereby disposable according to General Statute and the 2019 Local Government Agencies General Records and Disposition Schedule. Smith said that the records would be destroyed offsite by a secure shredding service, which would guarantee the security of the material and render a Certificate of Destruction once the material is destroyed.

*Councilman Kinneman moved to approve the destruction of records predating 2019 as reported in the destruction log. Councilman McClellan seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously (5-0).*

Mayor Schneider expressed confidence in Staff's review of records and determination of disposability. She noted that a description of records slated for destruction can be found on the Town's website.

- **Consideration/Approval Parks & Recreation Advisory Board recommendations.**

Modification of Fee Schedule

Town Manager Bill Bruce requested that the portable propane grill be removed from the Fee Schedule, noting that it has been rented out only one time since it was made available and that it is cumbersome to clean and transport. He clarified that the grill would continue to be available for use at special Town events.

Change of Meeting Time

Bruce requested that the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board meeting time be changed from 7:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. to allow for an earlier start time.

*Councilwoman Pittman moved to approve the modification of the Fee Schedule as recommended by the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board. Councilman Spencer Sullivan seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously (5-0).*

*Councilman Kinneman moved to approve the change in Parks & Recreation Advisory Board meeting time from 7:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Councilman McClellan seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously (5-0).*

- **Consideration/Approval of Budget Amendment for Music in the Park events.**

Bruce stated that the 2023 Music in the Park program has been expanded and requested the Parks Special Events budget be amended to include an additional \$10,000 in expenses and \$10,000 in revenue. The requested funds are to cover startup costs for the expanded program, which include marketing materials, band costs and various products. Bruce anticipates that the funds will be made up in revenue this fiscal year.

*Councilman McClellan made a motion to approve the budget amendment to increase the Park's Special Events revenue by \$10,000 and to increase the Park's Special Events expenses by \$10,000 for Music in the Park startup costs. Councilwoman Pittman seconded the motion.*

Councilman Kinneman asked if the revenue would be made up in the current fiscal year. Bruce replied that it will, and additional expenses and revenue are also budgeted for the next proposed fiscal year budget.

Mayor Schneider expressed gratitude to Deputy Clerk Ashley Royal for her leadership in organizing the event.

*The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).*

## **8. NEW BUSINESS**

### **A. Presentation of 2023-24 Fiscal Year Budget.**

Town Manager Bruce expressed appreciation to members of the Finance Committee, Finance Officer Sam Anders, and his staff, notably Brianna Cardwell, for their input, oversight, and expertise in preparing the 2023-24 Fiscal Year Budget. Bruce pointed out that the Finance Committee met four times to prepare the proposed budget.

Bruce presented the proposed Town of Oak Ridge Fiscal Year 2023-24 budget. He said that the budget reflects several major capital investment projects which have been working initiatives in the Town's Strategic and Capital Improvement Plans for multiple years. These projects include the construction of Heritage Farm Park, the establishment of a municipal water system, the conversion of the historic Redmon House into the Farmhouse Community Center along with functional and aesthetic improvements to adjacent grounds as an entrance into the Town Park, and construction of the Veteran's Honor Green at Heritage Farm Park. He noted that these projects are each partially to fully funded by county and state grants. In addition to these capital investments, the budget includes funding for an inclusive playground at Heritage Farm Park, improvements to Town Park facilities, and support for special events such as Music in the Park, the Town's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and Light Up the Night, improvements to NC 68/NC 150 intersection, continued support of trails and open spaces, and support for up to a 5 percent merit increase

for staff. He quoted an increase of 14 percent in operating expenses, which will be offset by a projected 10 percent increase in revenues garnered from property and sales tax receipts, interest income, and ABC revenue. This revenue increase is outside of grants and donations. Bruce proposed no change in the property tax rate of 8 cents per \$100 of property value which was adopted in 2017. He anticipates that the budget fund balance will be more than \$2 million at the end of Fiscal Year 2023-24. Bruce concluded by indicating that the Budget message is available in hard copy at the meeting and at Town Hall, and it will be posted on the website.

Mayor Schneider stressed that a public hearing to consider and approve the proposed FY 2023-24 budget will occur at the next Town Council meeting on June 1, during which there will be the opportunity to entertain further public comment. She also maintained that there would continue to be two public comment opportunities during this meeting, but that a vote would not yet take place.

Councilman McClellan said that he sat as Council liaison in two of the Finance Committee meetings. He remarked on the committee members' diligence in seeking distinction between grant money and Town funds in each budget consideration. He believed the budget to be fiscally conservative considering the number of large projects programmed into it, and he stressed that the Town is living within its means.

Councilman Kinneman suggested removing the \$100/month increase in stipend for Council from the budget. He calculated this total saving to be \$6,000 in one year, which he advocated could be used in other areas of financial concern. He believed this move would set a good example of fiscal prudence in reallocating the savings into another area, such as modestly offsetting some cost of the large projects programmed into the budget.

Councilwoman Pittman thought the budget was ambitious in assuming the large capital investments, but pointed out that the receipt of several large grants is notable. Though both revenue and expenses are experiencing increases, she believed the operating budget to be lean. Sitting on the Finance Committee, Pittman said she was familiar with the proposed budget, but realizes that the information is new to many others. In this light, she encouraged anyone with questions or concerns to contact her.

Councilman Sullivan appreciated the efficiency of the Town Manager's budget message. He pointed out that many of the projects have been developing over several years and the Town has been very responsible with its financial planning to prepare for these investments. He asked Bruce to explain the \$2 million fund balance. Bruce replied that the \$2 million is the total fund balance and not an addition to the fund balance. The capital projects planned will draw from the fund balance and are projected to reduce it to a total balance of \$2 million. He expects the budget to be approximately \$600,000 of revenue over operating expenses.

Mayor Schneider explained that the proposed stipend increase for Council had been an initiative started three years ago to bring Council compensation to a comparable amount with other area municipalities. She stressed that the stipend amounts to less than ½ of 1 percent of the total administrative budget of \$1 million. She believed this sum to be a reasonable recognition of those who currently and will in the future serve the Town. Schneider then commented on the active planning that has

occurred for several years for the large projects. She noted that Heritage Farm Park, Veterans Honor Green, and the Farmhouse Community Center have been in the Town's vision since 2018, the Town's trails and sidewalks have been developing since the Pedestrian Plan was adopted in 2013, and discussions for a municipal water system began about the time the Town was incorporated. She believed the proposed budget to be thoughtful, intentional, and ambitious. She emphasized the Town's intention for financial transparency and encouraged citizens to read the Budget Message.

**B. Consideration / Approval of Revised Town Water Rate.**

Bruce explained that the costs of chemicals as well as services for water system management have increased. He said that the Water Advisory Committee recommends a rate increase from \$21.00 per month plus \$6.50/1,000 gallons per month to \$24.00 per month plus \$7.50/1,000 gallons per month to cover the increase in costs. He noted that the rate proposed is lower than the current rate of one private water system provider and lower than the proposed rate of another major private water system provider. The Town anticipates having 15 to 20 new customers on its municipal water system as soon as homes in the Honeycutt subdivision are occupied.

*Councilman Sullivan moved to approve Resolution R-2023-09 amending the Town of Oak Ridge Water System Fees and Charges Schedule. Councilwoman Pittman seconded.*

Councilman Sullivan noted that inflation has affected every area of our lives. He clarified that funds and expenses related to water system management are not a part of the Town budget but are kept in a separate Enterprise Fund. As such, revenue is needed to offset expenses, and the proposed rate increase will cover these operating expenses as well as allow for a reasonable rate of return. The rate being proposed now is in anticipation of having customers online in the Town's water system.

Councilwoman Pittman expressed appreciation to the Water Advisory Committee as well as to Mayor Schneider and Councilman Sullivan for their due diligence and for their efforts to develop a municipal water system for the Town.

Councilman Kinneman asked if the rate increase would require State approval. Bruce answered that it would not. Kinneman asked how much less the proposed rate is to the comparable private water system providers' rates. Bruce answered that one rate is \$24.11 per month plus \$7.57/1,000 gallons and the other has requested an increase to \$25.31 per month plus \$7.89/1,000 gallons.

Councilman McClellan noted the increases in costs and thanked the committee and Councilman Sullivan for their efforts.

Mayor Schneider pointed out that the rate being suggested was a result of the proposed budget conducted by the Town's water system operator, Environlink.

*The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).*



**9. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

- Mike Stone, 8112 Hunting Cog Road, reflected on the 20 percent increase in taxes last year due to the County's property revaluations. He correlated this increase to the increase experienced in tax revenue and stated that this should be returned to the citizens. He pointed out that the 14 percent increase in operating expenses is due to inflation that is being experienced by everyone. Stone asked for greater clarification on the resulting \$2 million fund balance and questioned why there is no consequent tax cut. Stone believed that the budget reflected a spending spree on large and pet projects. He presumed that if Council would not consider removing the \$6,000 proposed increase in Council compensation, then it would not likely consider savings on other bigger line items.
- Ben Walraven, 5931 Pepper Road, said that he had reviewed the Town's Strategic Plan introduction statement which noted a focus on parks, infrastructure, preservation, and growth/development. He noted Council's reviews of the plan in 2021 and 2022 to identify priorities and guide future efforts based on emerging trends and issues. Walraven referred to Boom Supersonic and Marshal Aerospace consuming 20 percent of the 1,000 acres dedicated to aerospace growth at the airport that would potentially bring an influx of people who will want to live in Oak Ridge. He stressed the importance of strategic planning to accommodate this growth, but cautioned against the unpredictability of issues which this growth can spur.
- Jim Harton, 5901 Pepper Road, said he is a member of the Finance Committee and is familiar with the efforts put forth by the committee to create a sound budget for the Town. He stressed that a budget operates as a guide. He noted that dedicated effort was made to accommodate the various projects that have been in the planning stages for years and have matured concurrently at a time when inflation is high. He stated that the proposed budget allows for action to be taken on these projects now.

**10. MONTHLY FINANCIAL UPDATE**

Finance Officer, Sam Anders, noted that the financials for the month of March were not presented at the April Town Council meeting due the meeting being held before month-end. He presented both the March and April financial reports, both of which are hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes.

- March Financial Update

Anders noted the early Whitaker property loan payoff of \$900,000 which resulted in a savings of \$125,500 in future interest payments and a \$0 debt payoff noted in Supplementary Schedule 4.

- April Financial Update

Anders noted that a financial audit will be performed beginning June 12, 2023, with anticipated completion by August 24, 2023.

Anders stated that the Truist loan for Heritage Farm Park closed on April 6, 2023. The loan check has been drawn and deposited in a money market account, where interest is being paid and earned. Anders explained that once all certifications are in place, funds will be drawn first from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant, then the state Parks & Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) grant, and finally from the loan proceeds. Drawing funds according to this schedule allows for a longer period of cost savings and maximizes the cash flow coming in for the project. He said that once the loan is accessed, funds will be transferred into a restricted Capital Project Fund account, and a distinguishing check color has been selected to transact payments for ease of identification and tracking. Anders noted that all funding, paperwork, means of tracking, and bill payment are in place in anticipation of breaking ground on the project. He noted that the first loan payment will occur on June 1, 2023, on the 15-year financing term at a rate of 3.94 percent.

*Councilman McClellan made a motion to approve the March and April Financial updates, and Councilman Sullivan seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).*

Mayor Schneider pointed out that the July Town Council meeting will occur on June 29, 2023, to avoid conflict with the Independence Day holiday. This rescheduling will result in a similar presentation of two months' worth of financials in the August 3 Town Council meeting.

## **11. COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **A. Water Advisory Committee.**

Chair Jim Harton reported that the committee met on April 26. They reviewed an updated water tower site plan with the entrance set to the north. He mentioned that the Historical Preservation Commission had previously reviewed and approved the water tower site plan and graphic, and the Planning & Zoning Board had approved the site plan. A meeting with Wooten Company will take place in mid-May to discuss the progress in planning for the water main line down NC 150 from the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County line. Harton also reported that the committee reviewed a 25-year historical timeline of the development of the municipal water system. He pointed out that the plan to bring Honeycutt subdivision wells online to the Town water system is progressing, though the Town is still awaiting the deeds to be turned over. He said that a representative from Envirolink was not present at the committee's meeting, but noted the cost increases in the Enterprise Fund budget.

### **B. Historic Preservation Commission.**

Committee member Barbara Engel reported that the commission reviewed and approved COA-23-02 to paint an existing residence located at 2200 Oak Ridge Road. The property was also approved to restore its siding. She noted that the commission also reviewed and approved COA-23-03 site plan and paint/graphics for the 250,000-gallon municipal water tower located at 8315 Linville Road.

### **C. Planning & Zoning Board.**

Chair Jason Streck reported that the Board met on April 27 and held a public hearing on rezoning case #RZ-23-01. The Board approved rezoning the property located at 1338 Forsyth Road from AG to CZ-RS-40. It also approved a subdivision plan making it possible for 9.6 acres on Stafford Mill Road to be subdivided into four lots. Additionally, the Board reviewed and approved site plan #SP-23-02 for a municipal water tower located at 8315 Linville Road.

**D. Mountains-to-Sea Trail Committee.**

Chair Anne Steele reported that the committee met on April 25 to discuss future trail workdays and guided hikes. She stated that progress was made on the Headwaters Trail during the April 26 workday. She noted that committee member Stephanie Ferrell had set up a booth at the April 29 Canine Capers event, which generated positive interest. Steele mentioned that a guided hike of the Headwaters Trail will take place on May 13, and a workday at Carriage Cove will take place on May 24. She finished by acknowledging Councilwoman Pittman's participation in the Friends of the MST event as a guest speaker and thanked her for her advocacy and support.

**E. Conservation Easement Committee.**

No report

**F. Special Events Committee.**

Chair Patti Dmuchowski reported that a Memorial Day ceremony is scheduled on May 29 at the Park's Amphitheater (backup location will be the Town Hall). She noted that Guilford County Commissioner Pat Tillman will be the guest speaker. She stated that plans continue for Light Up the Night, July 4 kids' parade, the Town's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and the Benbow House's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Dmuchowski acknowledged significant pledges to the Veterans Honor Green from the Lowrey family, Ramilya Siegel, and the Merchants of Oak Ridge. She stated that with matching donations from the Town, the original goal of raising \$200,000 had been met. However, due to rising costs, that goal is being increased to \$240,000. The committee expects to complete bids for the project in August and anticipates construction to occur concurrently with the development of Heritage Farm Park. Dmuchowski finished by expressing gratitude to the Town and Council members, notably Mayor Schneider, for their support of the Veterans Honor Green project.

**G. Tree Committee.**

Vice Chair Gigi Danner reported that the committee met on April 6 to review its participation in Heritage Day on September 30, which will qualify the Town for the 2023 Tree City USA distinction. She noted that Taylor Jones of the NC Extension Office will speak at the event about tree health.

**H. Parks and Recreation Advisory Board.**

Co-Chair John Browning reported that the Board met on April 20. He thanked Council for approving the adjustment of the Board's meeting time. He stated that the Board approved a youth running camp for youth 8- to 14-years-old that will run

from July 24 to August 4 and benefit the Second Harvest Food Bank. He also noted the expanded time made for pickleball at the park during the summer season and gave positive feedback on the operation of Scoop Zone as the frozen treat vendor for the season. He ended by acknowledging the successful relocation of the first community band event of Music in the Park to Oak Ridge United Methodist Church due to inclement weather. He thanked the sponsors of Music in the Park (Maureena Shepherd & Associates-Allen Tate Realty, Oak Ridge Commons, Domino's and Tire Max) for their support.

**I. Finance Committee.**

Chair John Jenkins pointed out that none of the committees reporting at the evening would be able to operate without the Council's approval of the fiscal year budget. He complimented the committee, Town Manager Bill Bruce and Finance Officer Sam Anders for their efforts in producing a responsible budget. He noted that the Council liaisons do not participate in the meetings to advocate for agendas, but that they are present to answer questions. Jenkins recognized that a lot of capital is being spent on projects for the fiscal year, but he believed the budget to be responsible and thought it necessary to fund these projects to promote livability in Oak Ridge.

**12. COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION REPORTS**

**A. Triad Municipal ABC Board.**

Board representative Jim Barbery noted that sales over the past year have been up by nearly 13 percent, resulting in a net profit increase of 20 percent. He reported that 11,120 bottles of liquor were sold in the first quarter of 2023, which is 316 more bottles than last year. Payment of \$42,003 was made to the Town for the first quarter of 2023, bringing the annual total to \$240,593, surpassing the Town's estimated budget of \$225,000.

**B. Oak Ridge Youth Association.**

No report

**C. Oak Ridge Military Academy.**

No report

**D. Oak Ridge Elementary School.**

Principal Penny Loschin reported that the Spring STEM night was more successful than the past fall's event. She noted that over 40 families attended the prospective Kindergarten night, and that the staff and faculty were well cared for during the PTO's Teacher Appreciation Week. Loschin explained that the PTO along with Apex Fundraising Co. conducted a daily character leadership program to teach the principles of social and emotional learning and encourage positive behavior. She also mentioned a successful fundraising effort of \$3,000, which involved her sitting on the roof of the school. She thanked the Oak Ridge Fire Department for helping

her get on and off the roof safely. Loschin pointed out that \$38,768 had been raised for student benefit, and that 25 days of school remain this year.

### 13. PUBLIC COMMENTS

- Jacob Binder, 7022 Carriage Cove Drive, offered his observations on the proposed Fiscal Year 2023-24 budget. He said that he shares Councilman Kinneman's concerns about the increase in the operating budget, stressing that the proposed \$6,000 increase in Council stipend cannot be easily justified, even if it is only ½ of 1 percent of the operating budget, especially given the large amount of money that is programmed to be spent on projects. He pointed out that a large portion of the money in the budget comes from grants. His concern is that the Town risks running out of operating revenue if it cannot get grants to continue to sustain these projects. Binder recalled Representative Faircloth's advice when presenting the state grant funding to Oak Ridge to not take these funds for granted and to not allow grant funding to be the new normal in funding large, long-term projects.
- Matt Schneider, 8506 Rosedale Drive, opened by commending the work of Council, staff, and all the citizens who serve on the various boards and committees for their careful preparation of the budget and for embracing a vision of Oak Ridge worthy of its history. He said that projects such as the Veterans Honor Green, Heritage Farm Park, and municipal water system will attract people to Oak Ridge, but the vision of Oak Ridge speaks to the faith placed by the founders of this country in a government by the people and for the people. He stressed that the citizen government of Oak Ridge is an example of the promise of America. Schneider stressed that if we do not embrace the projects that will attract people to the Town, then the Town will risk becoming like so many other towns that have diminished into shuttered commercial districts and ghost towns.

### 14. COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Sullivan referenced the comments made by Ben Walraven during his report. He said that Council is acutely aware of the development being experienced, especially around the airport and of the pressures this growth places on Oak Ridge. He mentioned the years of careful planning for managed growth designed to maintain the character of the Town that has gone into the proposed budget. He recognized the pressure that the Town's infrastructure will undergo, but said that much of this pressure, such as that on roads and schools, will be out of the Town's control. Sullivan mentioned that the Town's Land Use Plan, Strategic Plan, ordinances, and Capital Improvement Plan are all designed for growth while maintaining the character of the Town and its quality of life. He said that Oak Ridge can be proud of its history and be open and adaptable to change and growth. He expressed admiration for John Jenkins and the Finance Committee, and said he hoped that everyone could appreciate the many years of planning which resulted in this budget.

Councilwoman Pittman was honored to represent Oak Ridge at the 2023 annual gathering of the Friends of MST where she had the opportunity to brag about the Oak Ridge team to over three hundred attendees at the meeting. She explained that

the Oak Ridge team is comprised of the MST Committee, Staff, volunteers, and the strategic vision of the Council. She mentioned that Oak Ridge was selected as an example to emulate for our strategic planning, integration of committees and for community engagement. Pittman referenced a hiker who had sought her out personally to express his appreciation of Oak Ridge for providing a safe and convenient place to camp on the trail where he could access water and provisions. She announced the Year of the Trail guided hike scheduled on May 13 to showcase Spring on the Headwaters Trail.

Councilman Kinneman expressed his wonder at the accomplishments of the MST Committee. Pittman added that the committee had logged over 44,000 hours of volunteer help, which is calculated at \$29/hour. Kinneman pointed out that all the Town's committees over deliver on their accomplishments. Kinneman also offered comments on Walraven's observations of the budget. He mentioned the need to conduct more frequent strategic planning sessions to accommodate the pace of growth and proactively meet unanticipated challenges. He encouraged the need to plan more aggressively and be more flexible when facing unexpected challenges.

Councilman McClellan re-emphasized the accomplishments of the MST Committee. Regarding the budget, McClellan offered that it is designed to address potential issues which may be faced by people who desire to live here. He alluded to the Heritage Farm Park, municipal water system designed for fire suppression and water consumption, and the Farmhouse Community Center as projects that will draw people to the town and are not "pet" projects, as one speaker had stated earlier in the meeting. McClellan pointed to the opening of new businesses in Oak Ridge as signs of growth and desirability. He closed his comments with appreciation of the Finance Committee and its chair John Jenkins, as well as gratitude to all committees.

Mayor Schneider noted that the Town's Strategic Plan includes an economic development component, which addresses the aspect of growth in the Town as well as a proactive planning agenda for managed growth. She stressed that the goal of the proposed budget is to serve the Town's residents in planning for the future. She noted that the numbers are cautious and conservative, and that the budget is tight, albeit ambitious. She acknowledged the success of the Canine Capers event and thanked Assistant Town Manager/Town Clerk Sandra Smith for her leadership. Schneider mentioned the first of what are expected to be monthly Council Hours sessions for interested citizens with Council members in hopes of fostering a stronger citizen engagement in Town activities. The first meeting will be held on May 25, 8:30-10 a.m. in the Town Hall conference room. The meeting will also be accessible via Zoom for those who cannot physically attend. She encouraged any citizen to drop in during the appointed time to pose their questions, have discussions, and offer comments to the two Council members who will host the meeting. As always, she emphasized council members' availability through phone, email or in person.

## **16. ADJOURNMENT**

*Councilman Kinneman moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:02 p.m., and Councilman McClellan seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).*

Respectfully Submitted:

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

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Ann K. Schneider  
Mayor