



**OAK RIDGE TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
JUNE 19, 2018 – 1:00 P.M.
OAK RIDGE TOWN HALL**

MINUTES

Members Present

Spencer Sullivan, Mayor
Jim Kinneman, Mayor Pro Tem
George McClellan
Doug Nodine
Ann Schneider

Staff Present

Bill Bruce, Town Manager
Sandra Smith, Town Clerk
Terry Lannon, Parks & Recreation Director

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Spencer Sullivan called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

2. APPROVE AGENDA

Councilwoman Ann Schneider made a motion to approve the amended meeting agenda after adding a closed session as Item 4. Councilman George McClellan seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously (5-0).

3. STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKSHOP

Mayor Sullivan said staff had drafted a vision statement based on Council's discussion at the last strategic planning meeting, and Council had agreed to discuss recreation at this meeting. Council members agreed by consensus to approve the vision statement drafted by staff.

Town Manager Bill Bruce led the discussion based on two decisions Council had made at the previous meeting: (1) To primarily provide recreational amenities for citizens, which can also be used by other groups when not in use by citizens, and (2) To maintain the current level of maintenance and upkeep of Town parks and recreational facilities.

Parks & Recreation Director Terry Lannon was asked how much property was in the current park and what trends he was seeing. Lannon said of the 80 acres in Oak Ridge Town Park, 14 percent is used for active recreation (athletic fields and mountain bike trail). About half of the property is wooded. The Bark Park is considered a passive use. Lannon said he had analyzed shelter reservations and field usage for 2018 to date. Of the 464 bookings, 55.8 percent were reserved by residents, about 40 percent by nonresidents, and about 4 percent by nonprofits. He said reservations of Shelter 2 had grown tremendously since the Town had added a parking lot and another playground in that area. He said it was difficult to gauge the number of people walking and exercising, and whether they are residents or

nonresidents. Lannon said community events were up, especially over the past 5 years with the addition of events such as Music in the Park, Heritage Day, the luminary event and craft fairs. On the topic of youth sports, Lannon said more children are playing baseball and softball, but they are playing on travel teams instead of in recreational leagues. He said lacrosse and soccer had grown in recent years.

Bruce asked what types of things in the area of parks and recreation does the Town do really well or that citizens appreciate. Bruce cited the current park and the mix of walking areas/trails, woodlands, athletic fields and open space, as well as the Bark Park, the Cascades Preserve, and locations for public events. Schneider also noted that the historic roots of the park were important, but Nodine said he did not feel that was an important aspect to most people.

Bruce then asked Council what they thought was missing, what people would appreciate having, or what the Town could do better. Nodine noted he had heard from several people about the desire for tennis courts. He also mentioned a splash park, and said he had heard complaints about trees falling down. Kinneman said he thought the Town struggled with awareness about events and how to make sure residents knew what Town activities were going on. Schneider said she thought a lot of people did not know about the Cascades Preserve and the Mountains-to-Sea Trail. Discussion of possible outdoor and indoor meeting spaces was also held (to possibly include a community center, emergency shelter, indoor basketball courts, and a kitchen to allow meetings, parties or community gatherings). Sullivan mentioned that the Town should not overlook the fact that the two largest churches in Oak Ridge have built very large multipurpose spaces in recent years that include basketball courts that are available for rent. Kinneman noted that he would like to see the Town consider partnerships with churches or other institutions.

The Council also discussed the possibility of needing additional parking at Oak Ridge Town Park. Lannon noted that another 70 spaces could easily be added to the current 300 parking spaces at the park without much impact.

Bruce then led a conversation on where the Council wants to go in terms of recreation over the next 5-10 years (i.e., does it want to grow sports programs, increase walking trails, etc.). Small neighborhood or pocket parks were discussed, and Council's consensus was that while the Town might encourage small, public parks as part of development, it would not focus on them at this time. Council then discussed encouraging the development of public trails in subdivisions and to continue development of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail. Schneider added that she would love to see some small to medium public art pieces, which could be permanently installed or could be movable.

As discussion moved to the current park and recently acquired Whitaker property, Bruce asked what Council's vision was. Schneider emphasized that open space was important. Sullivan said in the short term, all he could envision at the Whitaker property was a perimeter trail, parking lot, restroom, and perhaps a picnic shelter. Kinneman said he thought the Council should consider whether tennis courts might be built there. Initially the Council had planned to install tennis courts at the Redmon Field, but Lannon said that would restrict events – such as Heritage Day and craft fairs – from being held in that space. Lannon added that if tennis courts were added at Redmon Field, he thought the current restrooms would be

inadequate. After additional discussion, Council's consensus was that if tennis courts, athletic fields, etc. were constructed on the Whitaker property, they should be constructed so as not to obstruct the current view of the property from Oak Ridge Road.

Bruce noted that Council had decided at the previous meeting to continue the same level of service and maintenance at Oak Ridge Town Park. Discussion was then held about whether possible additional athletic fields should be built at the current park facility, or if they should be built on the Whitaker property. Schneider and Kinneman said they thought the current park was built out and any additional fields should be considered for the Whitaker property. Lannon said it was possible to add a youth baseball field and a smaller, multipurpose practice field at the park, and that they would not really obstruct the view of the open fields along Linville Road. McClellan asked if that would still allow overflow parking or possible expansion of the current parking lot, and Lannon said yes. Lannon said T-ball and any age youth baseball up to Bronco could play at the proposed youth field as well as all ages of girls' softball. He added that all tasks at the park have an assigned amount of man hours, and park staff is currently operating at a deficit; moving and possibly trailering equipment to move it to another site would only increase that deficit. In response to a question from Nodine, he said the addition of a youth baseball/softball field and a multipurpose field would take up about 4 acres out of the total of 80 at the park. Nodine said he would prefer to have those athletic facilities at the current park property, since there is already a parking lot there. Lannon added that there is also a well for irrigation, and electrical service could easily be added there.

Discussion continued about whether to build additional athletic fields and tennis courts at the park or to instead place them on the Whitaker property. Schneider stated that she really did not want to see lighted athletic fields on Linville Road. The value of open space and the view from the roads at both properties was discussed. Lannon said the downward slope from Linville Road would nearly prevent the proposed youth baseball/softball field from being seen from the road, and the proposed multipurpose practice field would not have fencing and would only require the addition of two light poles. Council agreed to allow Lannon to develop plans and look at both scenarios.

The Council then began to discuss the Chester Redmon house and what to do with it. Schneider said she, HPC Chair Debbie Shoenfeld and staff had recently met there to look at the house. She said the house may be older than originally thought, that it is in the Historic District, and it is the only remaining vestige of the original farm left on the property. She suggested getting rid of the outdoor storage spaces, and to strip down the house to learn the true condition of it. She said she thought the Town was obligated to serve as a model in the handling of the house since it is a contributing structure in the Historic District. Based on an estimate by Planning Director Sean Taylor of perhaps \$10,000-\$15,000, Schneider suggested the Town spend money to have the inside of the house demolished to see the bare bones of the structure and then re-evaluate the structure at that time. Council agreed by consensus to the interior demolition and to have staff do an investigative study including potential uses of the house, and to get the storage buildings cleaned out and removed.

Kinneman again noted that he wanted to spend time working on partnerships with different organizations including churches, Oak Ridge Military Academy and Oak Ridge Youth Association.

Bruce noted four topics the Council had focused on, which included walking paths and trails, pocket parks, and passive and active recreation needs to include both the park and the Whitaker property. He said the overarching theme he had heard was that the Council did not want to overbuild, and that generally any infrastructure at the Whitaker property would be placed on the back of the property so as not to obstruct the view from Oak Ridge Road.

Regarding park development, Lannon noted that the park is made up of about 80 acres. Of that 9.86 acres (12.3 percent) are athletic fields and their ancillary common areas, open fields (Redmon field, small and large practice fields) make up 10.29 acres (12.8 percent), and remaining open space is 19.03 acres (23.7 percent). The wooded area makes up 40.8 acres (51 percent) of the property. Currently 9.86 acres are considered active recreational areas, and 70.03 acres are used for passive recreation. Currently 12 percent of the park is taken up by regulation athletic fields; if the youth baseball field is added, that number would increase to 14 percent.

Sullivan, Nodine and McClellan agreed that the percentage of the park used for active recreation should be kept under 20 percent. Schneider said she would prefer to keep that down to 15 percent. Nodine said he thought the active recreation should be primarily at the park and the Whitaker property used for passive recreation; he said he would be OK, though, with putting tennis courts at the Whitaker property if they cannot be accommodated at the Redmon Field. Schneider wanted to know if the Town Council has final say over proposed new amenities at the park, even if they were recommended by the Parks & Recreation Commission and active recreation facilities comprise less than 20 percent; Council members said yes.

Bruce suggested allowing staff to prepare notes on the meeting and suggesting some upper level goals; Council could then fine tune and develop goals at the next meeting, which was scheduled for July 17 at 1 p.m.

4. CLOSED SESSION

To establish, or to instruct the public body's staff or negotiating agents concerning the position to be taken by or on behalf of the public body in negotiating the price and other material terms of a contract or proposed contract for the acquisition of real property by purchase, option, exchange, or lease per N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(5)(i).

Councilman McClellan made a motion to go into closed session at 3:20 p.m. Councilwoman Schneider seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously (5-0).

Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman made a motion to return to open session at 3:35 p.m. Councilman McClellan seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously (5-0).

5. ADJOURNMENT

Councilwoman Schneider made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:35 p.m. Councilman McClellan seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously (5-0).

Respectfully Submitted:

Sandra B. Smith, NCCMC, CMC
Town Clerk

Spencer Sullivan
Mayor