



**OAK RIDGE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING  
JUNE 4, 2020 – 7:00 P.M.  
OAK RIDGE TOWN HALL**

**MINUTES**

**Members Present**

Ann Schneider, Mayor  
Jim Kinneman, Mayor Pro Tem  
George McClellan  
Doug Nodine  
Martha Pittman

**Staff Present**

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

*This meeting was conducted remotely under N. C. Gen. Stat. § 166A-19.24 by use of simultaneous communication using the Zoom online platform and in which Town Council members participated by simultaneous communication. Town Council members were joined and participated in the entire meeting, unless otherwise noted.*

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Ann Schneider called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Schneider asked Town Clerk Sandra Smith to conduct a roll call for Council members and staff.

**A. Invocation/Moment of Silence.**

Rev. Susan Mitchell of Oak Ridge United Methodist Church offered the invocation.

**B. Pledge of Allegiance.**

Mayor Pro Tem Jim Kinneman led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**2. MAYOR'S STATEMENT CONCERNING THE EMERGENCY**

Mayor Schneider read from a prepared statement, explaining that the meeting was being conducted electronically over Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic and that the public had been invited to join by phone or electronic device. Schneider said residents who wanted to make public comments had been invited to participate in the electronic meeting or provide their comments to the town clerk.

**3. APPROVE AGENDA**

*Councilman Doug Nodine moved to approve the meeting agenda, and Councilman George McClellan seconded. Via roll-call vote, the motion was passed unanimously (5-0).*

**4. APPROVAL OF MAY 28, 2020 SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES**

*Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman made a motion to approve the meeting minutes, and Councilwoman Martha Pittman seconded. Via roll-call vote, the motion was passed unanimously (5-0).*

**5. PUBLIC HEARING ON 2020-21 FISCAL YEAR BUDGET**

The proposed 2020-21 fiscal year budget was presented by Town Manager Bill Bruce. Bruce explained that the budget was a collaboration between the finance officer, Finance Committee, members of various committees, and himself. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, those involved had gone through 11 iterations of the budget as they continued to receive information and updates from the state and various county departments. He presented the budget message, the proposed budget ordinance, and the budget worksheet, all of which are hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes. The proposed budget kept the property tax rate of 8 cents per \$100 of assessed property value, which was first levied in 2017, unchanged. Bruce invited questions or comments.

John Jenkins, chair of the Finance Committee, explained how the budget was prepared and what items were covered at each of the committee's meetings. He said a line item-by-line item analysis is done each year. He said the committee is pleased with the proposed budget.

Mayor Schneider explained the rules and opened the public hearing. She explained that staff had publicized how to call in or email a comment regarding the draft budget or how to sign up to speak during the meeting. She said public comments could also be submitted after the meeting, and that a second public hearing would be held on June 18. Schneider explained that if the June 18 meeting is conducted on Zoom, public comments will be accepted for 24 hours following that meeting.

*Speakers:*

- Patti Dmuchowski, 7320 Hidden View Drive, spoke in favor of the proposed budget. As chairperson of the Special Events Committee, Dmuchowski said she was required to meet with Bruce and the Finance Committee, and she felt they asked her pertinent questions to help develop the budget. She said she appreciated that the property tax rate would remain unchanged.

With no one else signed up to speak, Schneider asked Town Clerk Sandra Smith to read any comments that had been received, and Smith reported the following:

- Frank Whitaker, 2338 Oak Ridge Road, said he was unable to attend the meeting, but he wanted to voice his support of the draft budget.

Mayor Schneider closed the public hearing.

*Council discussion:*

- Councilman McClellan asked if the Town was not awarded the \$450,000 NC Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) grant for construction at the Whitaker property, would decisions have to be made about moving forward with that construction; Bruce said yes.

- Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman asked if the major hit to the budget was from sales tax revenue, and Bruce said yes and that the Town had used the same projection figures as Guilford County had. Kinneman said that if sales tax revenues are greatly diminished or if the PARTF grant is not received, the Town will still be adding to its fund balance and the Council will have plenty of opportunities to delay building at the Whitaker property if feels that is necessary.
- Councilman Nodine asked what effect less money going into the fund balance would have on future years. Bruce said the Town would still be maintaining a fund balance of about \$2 million, and although less money going into the fund balance would cascade, the effect would not be felt immediately. Nodine then commented on the 2.5 percent proposed salary increase for staff, saying that a 12 percent unemployment rate is being experienced and that every business owner in the Town is suffering a reduction in their income. He said it seemed like a poor idea to give a 2.5 percent raise to staff this year.
- Councilwoman Pittman said she understood that merit increases for staff were removed from the budget and that the 2.5 percent increase was just for cost of living increases; Bruce agreed, saying that an additional 2.5 percent for merit increases was on an earlier version of the budget but was later removed. Pittman said staff had gone above and beyond and had kept the Town running while many people were isolated due to COVID-19. She said to deny staff a cost-of-living raise when it could be afforded seemed more like punishing Town staff for others' misfortune. She said she was pleased that projected revenues exceed the projected operating costs by \$303,554. Regarding athletics, Pittman said there was no line item in the budget for youth athletics or Oak Ridge Youth Association, but there is Town support for the youth of the community, and the subsidy for ORYA is included in the budget. She said the Youth Athletics committee, with help from ORYA, has been working to quantify that number. The new agreement with ORYA for usage of Town Park facilities will include and even increase that, and Pittman said she expects a budget amendment to be needed in the future to cover that.
- Councilman McClellan asked if the budget takes into account an 8 percent revenue reduction but spending had also been adjusted, so that \$303,555 was being added to the fund balance; Town Manager Bruce said yes. McClellan said that would help defray some of the capital improvement expenses. He noted that projected revenues were taken into account, spending had been reduced, taxes had not been raised, and the addition to the fund balance would help defray capital expenses, creating what he called a very fiscally responsible and conservative budget. He said making all that happen had earned staff the 2.5 percent cost-of-living increase.
- Mayor Schneider agreed that the proposed budget was fiscally responsible and that additional time had been taken in preparing the budget this year due to COVID-19. She said she was hopeful that the economy would improve, but she reminded Council and citizens that changes could be made to the budget for various reasons, such as if the PARTF grant is not awarded to the Town. She said she agreed with the cost-of-living increase for staff, which would cost the Town \$10,500, or less than one-half percent of the \$2.5 million budget. Without that increase, staff would basically be receiving a decrease, she said. Schneider said she thought dipping into the fund balance

this fiscal year would be for once-in-a-lifetime, capital projects at the Whitaker property. She added that this Council is extremely fiscally responsible with public money.

- Nodine said since he had brought up the cost-of-living adjustment, he wanted to say that the cost of living is down from April 2019 to April 2020. Instead of calling it a cost-of-living adjustment, he would just call it a raise.

Schneider said the budget would be considered further at another meeting.

## 6. NEW BUSINESS

### **Board/Committee Appointment/Reappointment.**

*Councilman McClellan made a motion to reappoint Caroline Ruch to the Historic Preservation Commission, and Councilwoman Pittman seconded. Via roll-call vote, the motion was passed unanimously (5-0).*

## 7. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Town Clerk Sandra Smith read a letter regarding water from Joanne and Robert Saunders, 8208 Kelly Ford Road, which is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes.

## 8. COMMITTEE REPORTS

### **A. Special Events Committee.**

Smith read a report by Patti Dmuchowski, committee chair. She reported that the committee had continued to meet via Zoom, and their major focus was on the proposed veterans' memorial. The committee had met with several landscape architects, and their schedule called for selecting an architect by July 1.

### **B. Planning & Zoning Board.**

Smith read a report from chair Ron Simpson, who reported that the Board had considered a site plan for a proposed 10-space parking lot at 8509 Linville Road on Town-owned property. The parking lot would provide access to the Mountains-to-Sea Trail. The Board voted to continue the case to the next meeting to allow staff to provide more information.

### **C. Mountains-to-Sea Trail Committee.**

Smith read a report by co-chairs Bill Royal and Anne Steele on the committee's activities, which include recent and future workdays on the Riverside trail project, a small grant from the Greensboro REI store, an Eagle Scout project, and a request for the public to help name the Town's trails.

### **Parks & Recreation Advisory Board.**

Phyllis Anders, vice chair, submitted a report regarding the Board's activities that was read by Smith, which included a Zoom meeting in which an Eagle Scout project was approved in the park and the June Music in the Park was discussed and canceled. Member John Garrett reported on the status of the brick paver project, and discussion was held about the charge from Town Council to investigate the feasibility of horse trails.

**8. COUNCIL COMMENTS**

**9. ADJOURNMENT**

*Mayor Pro Tem Kinneman made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:06 p.m., and Councilwoman Pittman seconded. Via roll-call vote, the motion was passed unanimously (5-0).*

Respectfully Submitted:

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Sandra B. Smith, CMC, NCCMC  
Town Clerk

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Ann K. Schneider  
Mayor