



**OAK RIDGE TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL CALLED MEETING  
JANUARY 7, 2025 - 9:00 A.M.  
OAK RIDGE TOWN HALL**

**MINUTES**

**Members Present**

Jim Kinneman, Mayor  
Mike Stone, Mayor Pro Tem  
Ann Schneider  
Michael Greeson  
Jim Harton

**Staff Present**

Bill Bruce, Town Manager  
Sandra Smith, Town Clerk/Asst. Town Mgr.  
Ashley Royal, Deputy Town Clerk  
Brock Dunigan, Parks Superintendent

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Jim Kinneman called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

**2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

*Mayor Pro Tem Mike Stone made a motion to approve the amended agenda after switching the order of items 3 (Old Business) and 4 (New Business). Councilman Jim Harton seconded, and the motion was passed unanimously (5-0).*

**3. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Consideration/Approval of alternatives to current athletic field Usage Agreement approach**

Mayor Jim Kinneman introduced for discussion a rebate-type program for field usage. He explained that the Oak Ridge Youth Association (ORYA), along with any other sports organization or club, would schedule and pay for fields through the MyRec reservation system. At the termination of their play season, the number of registered Oak Ridge residents who participated would be used to calculate a rebate for the organization based on an agreed upon rate for each resident player. The rebate, he added, would be limited to the amount of field usage. He explained that if the total rebate is less than the cost to rent the fields, then the organization would receive the full rebate amount. If the rebate is more than the cost to rent the fields, then the cost for field rental is reimbursed and the overage in rebate is not paid out. Kinneman said he believed that the rebate program for field usage would enhance marketing opportunities for both the Town and the organization participating in the program as well as simplify the partnership between the Town and the

organization. He suggested a 14-day cancellation policy to avoid overscheduling fields.

Councilwoman Ann Schneider admitted that past Usage Agreements with ORYA had been unsuccessful and said she was happy to dispense with future use of such agreements provided that key elements of the agreement, such as facility clean-up by the renter, would transition to the agreed upon alternate program for field use. She added that a learning curve would be inherent in migrating from an agreement with a nonresident surcharge to a program with a resident subsidy.

Councilman Jim Harton focused on the need to correctly identify the number of residents compared to nonresidents who regularly use the fields. Park Superintendent Brock Dunigan reported that approximately 42 percent of users in the current year were residents. Harton pointed out that Council would need to consider whether to support field usage largely for nonresidents, in which case recovering some of the money spent would be advisable, and the next time the need for additional fields is expressed, Council would need to know whether it would benefit Oak Ridge residents. He noted his favor of the rebate program because it distinguished between resident and nonresident usage of park facilities.

Mayor Pro Tem Mike Stone supported dispensing with the current Usage Agreement in favor of an alternative approach. He expressed concern with instigating a 14-day cancellation policy due to the unpredictability of last-minute changes or issues often experienced by volunteer coaches. Stone stated disfavor for charging nonresident fees. He pointed out that the park was funded by state tax dollars which everybody paid and that the concept of "pay to play" was ridiculous. He believed that the influx of nonresidents to the park was owing to the quality of park facilities and the reputation of the ORYA program. Stone questioned the practice of charging fees for anyone to use park facilities and suggested discontinuing the practice to simplify and improve access to park facilities. He stressed that establishing a priority system for scheduling field use was needed to further simplify the process for allocating fields for use.

Councilman Michael Greeson did not agree with a 14-day cancellation policy, citing that no one can predict a conflict in their schedule that far in advance. He said he disagreed with the practice of penalizing failure to show up for a reservation by doubling the fee.

Kinneman responded that the practice of a 14-day cancellation was used by the Town of Jamestown, while Oak Ridge had a 48-hour cancellation policy in place. To ensure that fields are returned in the same condition in which they were rented, Kinneman suggested establishing a field recovery fee so that a renter may opt to pay for clean-up of the facility rather than cleaning it up themselves. He suggested that the user pay for field clean up or be penalized with a double or triple fee for not cleaning up or for not scheduling a cleanup in advance of the reservation. Kinneman clarified that if a field was reserved but not used, the renter would be responsible for the rental fee alone and that no other surcharge would be applied.

Kinneman asserted that he disfavored not charging any fee for the use of park facilities. He commented that he did not expect the Town to make a profit off field

rentals, but explained the reason for fees was to guarantee use of the facility. He added that fees help to recover some cost for usage and discouraged scheduling conflicts and potential abuse of the privilege to use the facilities. He said that charging fees was a common practice among most neighboring towns.

Schneider noted that issues could arise if a 14-day cancellation policy were applied to individual renters experiencing last minute schedule changes, however, organizations and programs generally plan for redundancies where assistant coaches or parents can step in when a coach experiences a scheduling conflict. She noted that it would be reasonable to have a cancellation policy for a valuable asset such as the park fields. She pointed out that the Usage Agreement had prevented multiple requests for field uses outside of the ORYA organization, and although the facilities were not intended to generate profit, rental fees should be an avenue to recoup some of the Town's costs. She stated that 70 percent of the Town's budget was allocated to Parks and Recreation due to the enormous costs for maintaining the grounds in terms of manpower and year-round turf care and management. Schneider pointed out that Oak Ridge facility fees were well below what others charge despite the Town having increased the number of its park facilities. She made clear that although the parks had been primarily built with state and federal money, the bulk of the parks' development and maintenance was sustained by Oak Ridge taxpayers.

Greeson stressed that cancellations were unavoidable in every situation. Kinneman commented in response that organizations typically have contingencies in place to prevent most unexpected cancellations. He indicated that staff had often accommodated such unexpected situations and did so without penalty. He suggested perhaps including an allowance in the policy of one or two cancellations before penalties begin to be incurred. He stressed the need for a cancellation policy as an incentive to avoid overscheduling.

Greeson asked how much revenue the park generated in the previous year. Town Manager Bill Bruce explained that in terms of operations versus revenue, the National Parks and Recreation Association recommended 20 percent in revenue over operation costs as a standard. He relayed that in the last four or five years, Oak Ridge had fallen slightly below this at 18 percent revenue over operation costs. He translated this percentage into \$20,000 to \$30,000, not including the ORYA stipend. Park Superintendent Brock Dunigan added that currently, 90 percent of parks revenue is from shelter rentals. Greeson commented that the revenue brought in for park rentals was a negligible part of the Town's overall income. Schneider disagreed that the amount of rental revenue was negligible, saying that small amounts add up. Greeson pointed out that money had been overspent on the Heritage Farm Park project, citing the award of the construction project when only one bid had been received. He stated that the initial construction estimate was \$1.7 million, but the project ended up costing \$5.2 million. Schneider interjected that high inflation over a period of some years resulted in a higher bid than was originally estimated. Greeson stated that the parks do not charge enough on rentals to make money.

Kinneman summarized his position on charging usage fees and penalties. He reiterated that without penalties, the renter would have no incentive to comply with

stated policies and staff would bear the responsibility of returning the field to its original condition.

Discussion on whether to apply penalties and how they would be charged continued. Key points discussed involved creating a fee that conveyed a sense of ownership of the facility being rented to reduce the likelihood of its abuse or neglect and improve an understanding of its value. There was also debate about whether fees and penalty charges should be applied to park users who already financially support the park through their taxes, regardless of their residency status. Much attention was given to details involving penalties for noncompliance with cleaning up fields after their use, specifically as it pertained to leaving soccer goals out and unattended. No agreement or action resulted from the discussion.

Kinneman urged Council to work towards developing an agreed upon model for field usage, citing practices adopted by Jamestown, which outsourced its recreation programs, and Pleasant Garden, which managed its recreation programs internally.

The focus of the discussion then turned to the details of the proposed rebate program. Stone asked how the proposed usage plan would encourage more residents to participate. Kinneman answered that a rebate would be awarded at the end of the season for each resident who participated in the organization or program. Harton cited a drop in ORYA resident participation from 61 percent in 2017 to 38 percent in 2024. Kinneman stated that no conditions would be attached to the rebated money so that the recipient could use the funds however they deemed appropriate, thus incentivizing programs to encourage greater resident participation. Schneider asked if facility reservations would be managed on a first-come, first-served basis, and Kinneman suggested that priority access to field reservations would likely be assigned to ORYA. Stone inquired into the terms of eligibility for rebates, and Schneider responded that any fee-based program or organization that rented park facilities would qualify for a rebate. Kinneman asked for a consensus from Council on the field usage approach being discussed. Harton indicated his consent, Schneider noted that the suggested approach was better than the current practice, Greeson expressed neutrality, and Stone expressed uncertainty, branding the rebate approach as convoluted. He stated that the approach should instead be more straightforward.

Schneider deemed the proposed rebate program to be simpler in execution than the current usage agreement but that it might appear complex because it required a shift in approach from charging nonresidents to subsidizing residents. She admitted that the former approach of front-loading the program with a \$30,000 stipend had been unsuccessful and that it did not foster positive partnership with ORYA. She said she favored the even-handed approach of the rebate program as it could apply to multiple programs or organizations. Harton added that the rebate program approach would provide data on resident and nonresident use of facilities, which would be useful when assessing future investments in the parks.

Kinneman stated that developing a cancelation policy, penalty fee matrix, details for priority usage, and rebate cost would require more elaboration. Schneider suggested that Council collaborate with staff to work out the details of the program and to solicit the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board for input once the program

was developed. She added that consideration should also be given to updating park facility fees and determining a schedule for assessing the rebate program and fee schedule. Discussion ensued regarding how to determine an appropriate rebate amount and how to identify the use of park facilities by residents in varying sports. Stone suggested including the charge for lighting as part of the charge for field use and asked if a similar study of rental utilization would be performed at Redmon House (Farmhouse Community Center). No agreement or action resulted from the discussion.

Kinneman suggested that a committee of two Council members and staff be formed to develop the rebate program and its policies. Town Manager Bill Bruce suggested himself, Deputy Town Clerk Ashley Royal, and Parks Superintendent Brock Dunigan as committee members. Harton and Greeson volunteered to be Council representatives on the committee.

*Councilman Jim Harton made a motion to evaluate the proposed rebate model as a working draft policy for park rentals and potential end-of-season rebates for Oak Ridge residents. Schneider suggested using the word "develop" in place of "evaluate" in the motion. Harton agreed to the amendment. Councilwoman Ann Schneider seconded the motion.*

Schneider suggested putting a timeline in place to develop the program. Kinneman recommended implementing the program by July 2025. Schneider stressed that a working policy would need to be approved by March to allow organizations sufficient time to transition to the new model of field usage. Bruce suggested that staff prepare a draft program which the committee would evaluate and build on.

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

Kinneman announced a five-minute break at 10:38 a.m.

The meeting resumed at 10:44 a.m.

**B. Oak Ridge Youth Association Past Due Balance**

Bruce referred to the invoice detailing ORYA expenses in excess of the \$15,000 stipend and the \$12,000 nonresident fee, which is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes. He also pointed to the proposal submitted by ORYA, which is hereby incorporated by reference and made a part of the minutes, which addressed the proposed method of remuneration of the field usage and nonresident fees,

Kinneman opened a discussion of the outstanding nonresident fee surcharge. Bruce explained that a pro-rated total of \$10,488 was owed, and Kinneman said that was based on a charge of \$8 per nonresident participant, which is what ORYA collected, even though the approved 2024-25 User Agreement called for a \$12 per nonresident fee.

Kinneman stated that the ORYA proposed payment plan suggested an initial payment of \$2,688, followed with three monthly payments of \$2,600 each.

*Councilman Michael Greeson made a motion to accept the proposed ORYA payment plan, and Councilwoman Ann Schneider seconded. The motion passed unanimously (5-0).*

Kinneman then began a discussion of the expenses incurred in excess of the \$15,000 stipend. Parks Superintendent Brock Dunigan reported that there was an overage of \$7,012.20. Kinneman stated that ORYA had requested 100 percent forgiveness of the amount owed. Greeson said he was in favor of forgiving the total owed. Harton stated that he did not agree with forgiving the total amount, taking note that ORYA had pledged to perform a financial analysis of the organization to ascertain its financial standing. Harton advised waiting on the results of the analysis and giving ORYA the opportunity to implement steps to improve its financial shortcomings. Schneider echoed Harton's perspective on the issue and added her willingness to forgive 10 percent of the overage owed. She explained that Council would not be proper stewards of the Town's finances if they were to forgo payment of expenses which could have been foreseen and managed through use of the MyRec reservation system. Greeson countered that ORYA did not have the option to raise fees to cover its costs. Kinneman raised his concern that safeguards were not apparent in ORYA's financial management to prevent overspending. He pointed out that ORYA was provided training on how to access their MyRec account to place field reservations and gauge their account balance. Dunigan pointed out that the ORYA stipend of \$15,000 had been overspent by about \$3,000 as soon as all field requests were received and booked at the beginning of the season. Greeson asked if the MyRec reservation tool had been included in the 2024-25 User Agreement with ORYA, and Kinneman noted that MyRec had been identified in the User Agreement as the required tool to place reservations, and that MyRec maintained ORYA's account balance in real time. He added that MyRec was not the problem. Discussion continued regarding how to manage the overage incurred by ORYA and how to prevent future issues with overspending.

ORYA President Phillip Southern shared his perspective on ORYA, its partnership with the Town, and its current financial standing. Southern considered ORYA to be stewards of youth sports in Oak Ridge, providing a youth athletic program by a volunteer organization in the Town's stead. He said he believed that a volunteer nonprofit organization providing a service at no charge to the Town should be granted field space to run that service at no charge. Southern attributed inflation and growth in the program to their increased spending, pointing out that ORYA had experienced a 30 percent growth in some sports, with baseball having grown by 66 percent in the last two years. He noted that while expenses and field usage had increased, ORYA's registration fees had intentionally remained unchanged. He stressed that the organization was not run as a business modeled around budgets, but as a group of volunteers who had been reliant on Town staff to oversee and regularly provide status updates on their overall usage and expenses. He explained that the introduction of an online reservation system to replace the former way of reporting facility usage and fees had not been an efficient transition for ORYA, but that it was working with its sports directors to shift into using the online reservation system to make up-front projections on their field usage. Southern commented that the Town forgiving the past season's overage would fit ORYA's model of being a volunteer-based service program wherein ORYA provided the programming and the Town, in return, provided the facilities. He said that increasing the stipend allowance to \$19,000 would assist ORYA with managing its

projected costs in the spring. He stressed that ORYA was actively engaged in developing strategies to overcome their issues and move forward with greater efficiency. Southern said that being a volunteer group, they were not equipped to manage a budget like a business with sound financial controls, reliable revenue, and expense projections.

Kinneman pointed out that volunteer organizations as large as ORYA could successfully adopt a business model and efficiently function similar to a business with defined job responsibilities and budgets. He cited the Lions Club and Boy Scouts as examples of volunteer organizations that have successfully functioned as businesses. Schneider added that many volunteer organizations operated well with budgeting parameters, citing the Town's own volunteer committees as an example.

Schneider emphasized the need for ORYA to put spending controls in place before entering usage requests in MyRec. She stated that unlimited use of fields for free had never been written into the Usage Agreement, saying that the assumption that the fields were free needed to change to a mindset of planning to pay for fields with the understanding that some usage would be subsidized while others would not once the subsidy amount was spent. She pointed out that when ORYA had been given priority access to the fields the Town had lost approximately \$20,000 in revenue generated from tournament use. She noted that the discussion of spending controls would be moot if an alternative field usage program were to replace the current Usage Agreement, but she stressed that switching from a volunteer to a business model mindset would be necessary.

Discussion continued to focus on how to manage the ORYA overage and if ORYA could improve its internal processes and achieve financial stability. Kinneman and Harton advocated delaying a decision pending resolution of the issues.

*Councilman Michael Greeson made a motion to delay requiring payment of the ORYA past due balance for a period of three or six months.*

Stone interrupted the motion to ask for more understanding of the growth rate of ORYA's program. Southern explained that a projection analysis performed two or three months prior outlined field usage by sport to identify which sports were experiencing growth and how much. He said that the analysis projected 30 percent growth rate for ORYA, which created higher expense thresholds for both the organization to run its program and for the Town to service the program's needs.

*Councilman Michael Greeson reiterated his motion to delay charging ORYA the past due balance for a period of three or six months. Councilwoman Ann Schneider made a friendly amendment to the motion to delay charges for three months, after which time a determination would be made on how to manage the overage due. Councilman Jim Harton seconded.*

Stone said he would support the motion, but expressed uncertainty that a three-month delay would generate any more useful data than had already been reviewed. Schneider commented that ORYA's financial overextension was indicative of an issue that needed to be identified and repaired. Stone asserted that consideration of rising costs should be factored into the evaluation of how to manage the overage. Harton stated that would be an internal issue with ORYA. Schneider noted that the

Town and ORYA considered future projections for field usage during the annual negotiations of the Usage Agreement. Kinneman added that ORYA had never approached the Town to request an increase of the stipend and request forgiveness for expenses owed, nor had the organization approached the Town to discuss the projected demands on their program. He noted that though the stipend had not been adjusted since the Usage Agreement had been in place, the facility fees charged by the Town had not changed either.

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

**4. OLD BUSINESS**

**Further Discussion of Current and Future Water Initiatives** *(from December 5, 2024, meeting)*

*Councilman Michael Greeson made a motion to postpone the discussion, and Councilwoman Ann Schneider seconded. The motion passed unanimously (5-0).*

**5. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

- Ben Walraven, 5931 Pepper Road, commented that both the Town and ORYA shared the same pool of stakeholders, and that discussion should be focused on problem-solving rather than conflict. He described the mutually beneficial relationship between the Town and ORYA as a volunteer service organization and pointed out that it had a positive impact on property values in the Town. He encouraged working together to solve the problems but stressed that he did not agree with forgiving what ORYA owes without ensuring that the issues have been corrected.
- Frank Carroll, 1389 Forsyth Road, Kernersville, commented that a clear articulation of what the problem was had not been established through discussion. He proposed a simplified solution which focused on charging ORYA 20 percent of field cost for priority access to the fields.
- Phillip Southern, 6409 Hollow River Drive, pointed out the weak and strong aspects of the ORYA program, designating its community involvement, level of play, and access to premier fields as strong points, and its finances and budgeting as weak points. He stressed that the Town needed to stipulate whether it would support an internal or external model for delivering youth sports programs. He considered ORYA's volunteer-run program in collaboration with the Town constituted an internal model, while opening sports programming to any outside source with a rebate program constituted an external model. He cautioned that he believed ORYA would not survive if the Town opted to pursue an external model.

**6. ADJOURNMENT**

*Councilwoman Ann Schneider made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 12:07 p.m., and Councilman Michael Greeson seconded. The motion passed unanimously (5-0).*



Respectfully Submitted:

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

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Jim A. Kinneman  
Mayor