



**OAK RIDGE TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
JULY 22, 2024 - 1:00 P.M.
OAK RIDGE TOWN HALL**

MINUTES

Council Members Present

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

Staff Present

Bill Bruce, Town Manager
Sam Anders, Finance Officer
Brock Dunigan, Parks Superintendent
Sandra Smith, Asst. Town Manager/
Town Clerk

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Jim Kinneman called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Councilwoman Ann Schneider made a motion to approve the agenda., and Councilman Mike Greeson seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

3. NEW BUSINESS

A. Consideration/Approval of possible update to the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

Mayor Kinneman turned the meeting over to Town Manager Bill Bruce, presented the CIP that was adopted in March with updates since that time. Bruce said the water main estimate was less than what had previously been given, but the main difference was that the booster station had been included in the earlier estimate. Bruce said that the booster station would not be needed for 10 to 15 years, which was far beyond the current CIP projection. The cost projection now is about \$500,000 less. Including construction administration and a contingency amount, the total estimate is now \$4,660,000.

John Grey of The Wooten Company discussed the updated cost projection. He said a good amount of water line work had been added to the elevated tank estimate, which would run the line out to the street and to the fire station. He said that piece of the project could be removed from the work on the elevated tank and included in the line work bid, which would likely

result in a cost reduction. Mayor Kinneman asked if that was because tank installers did not typically do line work, which could cost more, and Grey said yes.

Councilwoman Schneider said that unless the line work to the water tank was completed soon after construction of the tank, that was not a good scenario because the fire department would not have access to the water. She said she thought moving forward with running the water line was a priority anyway.

Discussion of the possibility of moving the location of the line or the hydrant was held, but it was determined the best place for the hydrant was at the road at the fire station.

In response to Council members' questions, Grey estimated removing the line work from the tank bid would likely reduce the tank bid by \$120,000. Councilwoman Schneider summarized that the change would remove about \$780,000 from the cost of the water tank and add about \$620,000 to the cost of the water main construction.

Town Manager Bruce asked Grey for a realistic timeline for when work on the water main might be started and completed. Grey estimated that they could be ready to submit permit requests in early August and it would take about four months after that. Grey said he did not know about bids for line work, and many companies might be working on other projects due to American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) deadlines. Because of that, he said the earlier the project could be bid out, the better it might be. Councilwoman Schneider summarized that the project could be bid out, the bids received, and an award made in January or February.

Councilman Greeson asked for construction timelines on the line and the tower. Grey said the line work would likely take about nine months, and the tower would be completed in about a year.

Bruce turned the Council's attention back to the CIP spreadsheet and updates that had been made. He said Councilman Mike Stone had obtained an estimate for pickleball courts. Bruce said the overall dimensions of the pickleball courts for which Councilman Stone had obtained estimates were about half the size of the graded pad at Heritage Farm Park. Doubling the number of courts proposed by Stone would likely cost about \$600,000. Stone said the original master plan for Heritage Farm Park showed six tennis courts and a basketball court. He said eight pickleball courts would fit in the space of three tennis courts.

Councilwoman Schneider said she understood there would likely be a cost savings if all courts were built at one time and that she had heard tennis court surfaces might be more expensive than pickleball courts. She indicated she would like to make sure that it would not be more expensive if the various courts were built at separate times.

Bruce directed Council to the spreadsheet again and specifically to the fund balance at the end of each fiscal year. He said Council had restricted \$1 million several years ago for water, and he assumed that would be unrestricted. He said the spreadsheet showed all the Town's current obligations.

Council members Schneider and Kinneman pointed out that the spreadsheet does not include the \$75,000 requested from the state budget from Rep. John Faircloth or the request for funding from Sen. Phil Berger's office.

Councilman Stone turned the conversation to pickleball and the possibility of using some of the money set aside for water to construct the courts. Mayor Kinneman said he was uneasy discussing new projects until the water main bid is received.

Referring to pickleball, Councilman Greeson asked if Council was willing to make citizens wait for what they want. Councilwoman Schneider said she thought people also wanted municipal water, and creating such a system would allow Oak Ridge to provide a real service and not just be a "paper town." She suggested waiting at least until the water main bids are received and putting pickleball into next fiscal year's CIP if it were to be considered.

Councilman Harton said the Water Advisory Committee had recommended putting in the elevated water tank due to further need for water at Heritage Farm Park and to be used for fire suppression. He said the Committee had been surprised by state grants received, which had changed what the Town might be able to accomplish sooner on a water system. Since that recommendation had been accepted by the previous Town Council, Harton suggested continuing to move forward with the water system.

Mayor Kinneman suggested Council wait the four to five months to get the water line bid so it could make more informed decisions.

Town Manager Bruce commented that previous Councils had an informal policy to allow the fund balance to go no lower than \$1 million, although the state requirement is much lower. With changes shown on Bruce's spreadsheet, he asked Council to focus on the fund balance at the end of each year.

Kinneman said the project at the NC 68/ NC 150 intersection had been delayed by NCDOT, so Council might consider moving that money out a year on the CIP. Stone also drew Council's attention to the \$400,000 earmarked in the CIP for sidewalks and landscaping around the intersection project as well as the money for sidewalks to Fogleman Road and Bastille Lane. Bruce said that did make the projections look better.

Councilwoman Schneider said she would still like to wait until the water main bids were received before making any changes. She also said construction of phase 1 of Heritage Farm Park would be completed this year, and she would like to consider building all amenities shown on the master

plan in phase 2 at once instead of doing it piecemeal. Schneider said she had heard a lot recently about pickleball but was not sure it was good to put those courts ahead of tennis courts. She said tennis courts had long been a goal of the Town and tennis players had been waiting many years.

Mayor Kinneman said he was willing to consider the design-build process, saying it would be an opportunity to determine the cost of the entire court sports project and Council might be able to only select certain items from the plan. He said no hard data had been presented, and he was hesitant to move pickleball ahead of tennis and basketball just because its supporters had been most vocal recently.

Councilman Greeson asked if the price for pickleball courts Stone had presented included lights, and Councilman Stone said no. Mayor Kinneman again brought up the possible additional costs for doing things piecemeal if the need for lights or other items was determined later. He added that he thought the Council owed it to the people who want tennis and basketball courts to tell them what the cost for only pickleball courts would be. Kinneman said he would not agree to a design that only included pickleball courts and it was unfair to ignore tennis and basketball.

After additional discussion, Greeson suggested getting a design-build bid for the entire sports court project.

Schneider suggested waiting to get design-build bids until the Council had the costs for all its proposed projects, including the cost of the water main.

Stone again suggested using the money set aside for sidewalks to build pickleball courts, saying the Town would not have to discuss the water project at all. He said the Town could build sidewalks in a piecemeal fashion or not at all.

Kinneman responded that he gets frequent requests for sidewalks. He acknowledged that various factions of citizens want different projects moved forward. He said he understood Stone wanted the pickleball project moved forward immediately, but the Council would have the water main bids in four or five months. He added that the Town might have a response from Senator Phil Berger regarding its request to the state by then.

Stone said Council was reviewing the CIP at that meeting, and he asked Council to make the decision to delay building sidewalks.

Schneider said the importance of sidewalks would need to be discussed more. She stated that the Town had just made a huge investment in recreational facilities in building Heritage Farm Park, but that walkability was also very important.

Councilman Harton asked if the Town was taking advantage of all possible grants to obtain money for all its proposed projects, including water and

pickleball. He said interest rates should start falling in the future and that might be an opportunity to borrow money for projects like pickleball courts.

Greeson responded that he was under the impression that the water system would only go as far as possible using grants. He said he did not know that Council was talking about obtaining loans. Kinneman again said Council needed to wait until it could make an informed decision, and he did not believe it had enough information now. Greeson said he thought Council had all the information it needed.

After a 5-minute break, Councilman Stone said that Council had a true picture of its finances currently and said there is currently \$550,000 earmarked for sidewalks. He asked what the Town offered in the parks for adults over the age of 55 other than walking trails and the amphitheater. Greeson agreed, saying the Town had invested \$8 million in parks and yet there was nothing there for adults. Schneider said the Town offered adults the ability to walk, run, bike and experience the beauty in its parks.

Stone said biking and running were the number 1 and number 2 activities for older adults in the United States, pickleball was third, basketball was fourth, golf was fifth, and tennis was sixth. Schneider said she had heard some data indicated pickleball might be declining, and Stone said its popularity had increased 223 percent in the last three years.

Schneider said sidewalks were not just about walking but were also about connectivity within the town.

Stone again asked what the parks offered to adults over age 55, and Kinneman and Greeson agreed there were not that many opportunities, with Greeson adding that most of the sidewalks in Oak Ridge don't go anywhere.

Kinneman said he was in favor of trying to see if phase 2 of Heritage Farm Park could be accelerated. Harton said he favored waiting four to six months to find out the results of the water main bid, to see if any trends in interest rates were being set, and perhaps know if Sen. Berger had obtained any money for Oak Ridge from the state. He added that the DOT project for the NC 150/NC 68 intersection was being delayed, but he still thought that money would be needed, particularly if costs rise. He said he was not opposed to adjusting the CIP after all information is gathered.

Greeson said he would like to see the costs of a design-build project for pickleball, adding that he had no problem waiting four or five months, but that he wanted to take steps to move forward with pickleball as soon as possible.

As conversation turned back to the water project, Stone said he had stayed away from taking any money away from that. He said there were no activities for adults in the parks, the town currently has sidewalks, and the fastest growing demographic for pickleball was 18- to 35-year-olds. He added that he did not believe 18- to 35-year-olds or people over the age of

55 would use sidewalks to walk to either Bastille Lane or Fogleman Road. Stone said using that money for pickleball courts could immediately get those people into the park.

Kinneman said he did not know if Council should re-evaluate any of its CIP projects until it has complete numbers, given all the town's construction project bids seem to be coming in high. Stone asked if that meant the town should put a hold on spending its money until all the numbers are received. Stone said that if the Council was going to delay making decisions, it should put a hold on sidewalks, further construction of trails, construction of phase 2 of the Veterans Honor Green, as well as construction tennis or pickleball courts. Harton reminded him that money had been donated for phase 2 of the Veterans Honor Green.

Schneider said she was not in favor of describing waiting as a delay tactic, but said Oak Ridge is known as a town that plans carefully. She said she understood the desire for pickleball, but asked what was pushing it so hard that the Council could be forgetting about projects such as connectivity or tennis and basketball courts.

Kinneman pointed out that the Town had also been intent on saving open space and preserving trees. He said some of the open areas at the parks are now used as event space.

Council again began discussing a design-build project, and Town Manager Bruce said he would like to have time to review that process. Bruce also made the distinction between some projects being discussed and pickleball, saying that some of the other projects are in the current fiscal year's budget and are in various phases of implementation.

Mayor Kinneman, in response to the majority of Council's comments, said Council needs complete information and estimates before changing the CIP. He said staff needs time to find out more about the design-bid process. He added that if a design-bid proposal is requested before Council is ready to move forward or has decided positively that it wants to, vendors might accuse the Town of getting a project design for free.

Councilman Greeson asked if the soil on the pad where courts would go has been compacted, something that could greatly impact a bid. Kinneman said staff needed time to determine that.

Greeson said it appeared there was not a consensus among Council that day to move forward with pickleball courts but said he could wait four to six months. Schneider said pickleball courts were still in the master plan design, but the question was just when to move forward.

Council members Kinneman and Greeson said they planned to follow up with Sen. Berger in a meeting on August 21, which Town Manager Bruce would also attend. Councilwoman Schneider reported that the County appeared not to be giving out additional money at this time.

Bruce said that the bid for the water tower construction was on the August Council meeting agenda, but asked whether he should ask The Wooten Company to remove the line work from the tank construction bid and add it to the water main construction. Council agreed by consensus.

B. Update on North Carolina League of Municipalities (NCLM) event

Councilwoman Schneider gave a short report and passed out information on the North Carolina League of Municipalities, which is an advocacy organization that can aid member cities and towns in the state with various issues.

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS

- Spencer Sullivan, 7917 Quiet Place, who is chair of the Water Advisory Committee, apologized for having to cancel the recently scheduled joint Town Council/Water Advisory Committee meeting due to illness. He asked that the Council reschedule the meeting soon.
- George McClellan, 2806 Oak Ridge Road, said he hoped that Council would vote in favor of approving the contract for construction of the water tower. He said North Carolina used to be the top-rated state in which to locate a business, but it now moved to number 2 because of lack of infrastructure. He said water was a priority, and that citizens want it. He said he thought pickleball was important too, but that it could wait.
- Phyllis Anders, 1827 Oak Ridge Road, said she was glad Council had not moved forward with construction of pickleball courts. Anders said she heard that people were not satisfied with the pickleball courts built by Stokesdale and were not using them. She encouraged the Town Council to take its time and construct the courts correctly. A member of the Parks & Recreation Commission, Anders said there were plenty of things at the parks that older people can enjoy.
- Patti Dmuchowski, 7320 Hidden View Drive, thanked the Council for \$50,000 commitment to phase 2 of the Veterans Honor Green. She said when she had done presentations to the community to solicit donations, she had always included phase 2 as part of the project, and she would like to get moving on that portion of the project as soon as possible.

5. ADJOURNMENT

Councilwoman Ann Schneider moved to adjourn the meeting at 3:07 p.m., and Councilman Jim Harton seconded. The motion was passed unanimously (5-0).

Respectfully Submitted:

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

Jim A. Kinneman
Mayor