



TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL

Town Hall
405 Martin Luther King Jr.
Boulevard
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Town Council

Meeting Minutes - Final

Mayor Pam Hemminger
Mayor pro tem Michael Parker
Council Member Jessica Anderson
Council Member Allen Buansi

Council Member Hongbin Gu
Council Member Tai Huynh
Council Member Amy Ryan
Council Member Karen Stegman

Wednesday, May 27, 2020

6:30 PM

Virtual Meeting

*** Revised May 27, 2020**

Virtual Meeting Notification

Town Council members will attend and participate in this meeting remotely, through internet access, and will not physically attend. The Town will not provide a physical location for viewing the meeting.

The public is invited to attend the Zoom webinar directly online or by phone.

Register for this webinar:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_yP9_QPMOSIO3zUOd-mVhsA After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar in listen-only mode. Phone: 301-715-8592, Meeting ID: 817 8754 2840

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Roll Call

Present: 8 - Mayor Pam Hemminger, Mayor pro tem Michael Parker, Council Member Jessica Anderson, Council Member Allen Buansi, Council Member Hongbin Gu, Council Member Karen Stegman, Council Member Tai Huynh, and Council Member Amy Ryan

Other Attendees

Town Manager Maurice Jones, Deputy Town Manager Florentine Miller, Town Attorney Ralph Karpinos, Fire Chief Vencelin Harris, Emergency Management Coordinator Kelly Drayton, Business Management Director Amy Oland, Business Management Assistant Director Matt Brinkley, Economic Development Officer Dwight Bassett, Urban Designer Brian Peterson, Executive Director for Technology and CIO Scott Clark, Communications and Public Affairs Director/Town Clerk Sabrina Oliver, and Deputy Town Clerk Amy Harvey.

OPENING

Mayor Hemminger opened the work session at 6:30 p.m. and previewed the agenda. She called the roll, and all Council Members replied that they were present.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY COUNCIL MEMBERS

0.01 Mayor Hemminger Regarding Proclamation for Safer for Everyone in Chapel Hill Campaign.

[\[20-0375\]](#)

Mayor Hemminger noted that Chapel Hill had recently joined the county and state in moving to Phase 2 of reopening. However, North Carolina had recorded significant increases in COVID-19 hospitalizations after 19 days of reopening, she said. The Town's "Safer for Everyone in Chapel Hill" campaign would promote face coverings in public settings throughout Town, said Mayor Hemminger. She urged residents to go out only when necessary and to wear face coverings in public when they could not be physically distant from others.

0.02 Council Member Stegman Regarding Pride Month Proclamation.

[\[20-0376\]](#)

Council Member Stegman announced that June was Pride Month and would be celebrated across North Carolina. As part of its continued advocacy for protections for all LGBTQ individuals, the Town was proclaiming June 2020 to be LGBTQ Pride Month in Chapel Hill, she said. Council Member Stegman listed the ways in which Chapel Hill had led the state in advancing equal protection and freedom under the law for LGBTQ individuals.

0.03 Mayor Hemminger Regarding Boards and Commissions Meetings.

[\[20-0377\]](#)

Mayor Hemminger said that many of the Town's boards and commissions would continue to meet virtually through the end of June and that times and locations could be found on the Town calendar at townofchapelhill.org.

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Update on Town Efforts to Respond to the COVID 19 Crisis. (no attachment)

[\[20-0364\]](#)

Emergency Management Coordinator Kelly Drayton updated the Council on Town efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic. She noted that Governor Cooper had signed an executive order that had moved the state into Phase 2 of reopening and changed the statewide Stay-at-Home order to a Safer at-Home recommendation. She listed several ways in which Orange

County's own declaration differed from the state's and described Town efforts to promote a Safer-at-Home campaign.

Ms. Drayton discussed a plan for Town-wide distribution of face masks. She said that local municipalities had been coordinating an effort to provide emergency housing assistance to lower income households. The Town's Food Bank had seen its highest numbers yet when it recently served more than 2,300 individuals and distributed 700 disposable masks, she said.

Ms. Drayton noted that the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-NC) had announced plans to resume classes on August 10 and to conclude the term on November 24, 2020. She discussed efforts to help local businesses through the Phase 2 re-opening and said that the Town would close some traffic lanes to create social distancing opportunities and would provide extra space for outdoor dining. She stressed the importance of being vigilant and remembering the three Ws: wear face coverings in public; wait six feet apart from others; and wash hands regularly during the pandemic.

Town Manager Maurice Jones said that the Town would receive approximately \$746,000 in federal CARES Act funding, which must be spent by January 1, 2021. The Town would need to submit a preliminary plan for how that would be spent, but the plan could be adjusted based on need, he said. He pointed out that Town expenditures far exceeded that funding but noted that the Town expected to seek FEMA reimbursement as well. Mr. Jones showed a breakdown of expenditures, and he projected \$1.97 million in costs between March 1 and December 31, 2020, due to COVID-19.

Council Members verified that they would participate in decisions regarding how the CARES Act funds would be spent. Some raised concerns about not having sufficient funding for food and personal protective equipment, and Mr. Jones repeated that the Town could seek reimbursement from FEMA for expenses beyond the \$746,000. The Council could also discuss such issues in relation to the FY 2020-21 budget, he pointed out.

Mayor Hemminger and Mr. Jones commented on how the situation was fluid and how the first plan that the Town submitted would not be its last. Mayor Hemminger praised staff members for their work and said that the Town would need them to continue working hard because the pandemic was not over.

This item was received as presented.

2. Update: FY 2020-21 Budget. (no attachment)

[\[20-0365\]](#)

Mr. Jones provided a summary of the recommended FY-2020-21 budget and explained how the COVID-19 pandemic had affected it. He said that the total budget of nearly \$111 million was a 2.2 percent decrease from the previous annual budget. The General Fund accounted for roughly \$66 million, he said.

Mr. Jones pointed out that the budget did not propose a property tax increase. It did not recommend any pay increases for employees and did not propose any changes in core Town services, he said. He said that he had looked for opportunities to reduce operational budgets of Town departments and had initiated a hiring freeze through the first quarter of FY 2021, at least. Mr. Jones mentioned several items that he proposed to reduce or eliminate with the hope of restoring them in the future. He was not proposing any reductions in the Town's Affordable Housing Fund or Human Services Agency funding, he pointed out.

Director of Business Management Amy Oland explained that the budget included flexibility to respond to growing Human Service needs and/or revenue shortcomings resulting from COVID-19. She said that staff anticipated shortfalls in sales tax, occupancy tax, department revenues, and perhaps other revenues as well. To provide flexibility, she proposed reducing the Town's total fund balance appropriation to \$2.489 million, an \$866,000 reduction from the previous year.

Ms. Oland said that holding about 60 positions vacant would yield \$1,180,265, and that those holds could be extended into the second quarter, if necessary. In addition, \$200,000 to \$400,000 in operational savings could be gained, if needed, by departments holding off on expenditures until the second half of FY 2021, she said. Ms. Oland pointed out that the Town would have a better sense of the financial impact from COVID-19 when it received sales tax funds on June 15, 2020.

Mr. Jones said that he anticipated bringing a couple of proposed ordinance changes to the Council at its June 3 meeting. Those would pertain to sidewalk dining and possibly closing a traffic lane on Franklin Street to enhance that, he said. He pointed out that he could incorporate a budget update at that time as well, if the Council so wished. The proposed schedule also included a public hearing on June 10 and adoption of the budget on June 24, Mr. Jones said.

In response to a comment by Council Member Anderson regarding deferred maintenance needs turning into larger problems over time, Mr. Jones agreed that there could be consequences. However, the Town needed to make some tough decisions, and staff's recommendation was to protect core services and push some maintenance issues off for at least a year, he said.

Council Member Anderson said that it would be helpful if the Council could know what other options had been considered.

Mayor pro tem Parker asked if staff had devised any scenarios for the possibility of UNC-CH not reopening, and Mr. Jones replied that the Town could extend vacancies to help cushion any additional blow, before it would have to talk about reducing core services.

Mayor pro tem Parker asked how the Town would monitor the possibility of services declining below a certain level and/or a position needing to be filled, and Mr. Jones replied that the Town could look at the possibility of hiring if certain areas were to begin struggling and affecting core services.

Council Member Gu asked about assumptions regarding the Town's Parking Fund and how the current reduction in downtown parking had impacted the budget.

Ms. Oland replied that COVID-19, combined with unknowns regarding the East Rosemary Street Parking Deck project, had made the task of projecting parking revenues for the year a challenge. Staff projections assumed that UNC-CH would return and that downtown parking might increase due to the public's fear of taking public transportation during the pandemic, she said. In addition, the Town was planning to increase the parking fee, Ms. Oland pointed out. She said that the Parking Fund had a small fund balance that the Town could tap into, if needed. In such a case, staff would talk with the Council about short-term alternatives, she said.

Mayor Hemminger pointed out that upcoming sales tax figures would not reflect the time after March 30 and that current sales taxes would be reflected in September figures, or later. She said that there might be some good news to finish out the year because the numbers had been slightly up for the first part of the quarter. She pointed out that the Town had a very healthy fund balance that could be used during hard times and then built back up again. Chapel Hill had options because it had been good stewards of taxpayer money over the years, Mayor Hemminger said.

This item was received as presented.

2.01 Consider Parking Design and Materials.*

[\[20-0373\]](#)

Economic Development Officer Dwight Bassett gave an update on the East Rosemary Street Parking Deck costs. He said that the estimated base budget was \$30 million, when additional car charging stations were included. The estimate also included \$280,000 for a Police substation and \$168,000 for a Parking Management office, he said.

During a discussion with Council Member Ryan, Mr. Bassett said that

estimated costs were almost \$31 million and that he was hoping to leave the current meeting with a better sense of what priorities the Council wanted to remove and/or add back. He could then return next time with a budget that was closer to reality, he said.

Council Member Ryan asked if the Town really needed a Police substation and a Parking Management office in the deck, and Mr. Jones said that it would not be absolutely critical to have those in the deck but that staff thought housing them there made sense. He said that the Parking Management office was the higher priority.

Mayor pro tem Parker raised the possibility of leasing vacant downtown space for the Police substation, and Mr. Jones replied that it would be difficult for the Town to afford that unless it could negotiate a deal that was more favorable than current leasing arrangements there. However, there might be an opportunity to make a deal with a property owner who was community-minded and would like to see the Police located on their downtown property, he said.

Mr. Bassett said that he had run a pro forma, for comparative analysis, and that leasing at the current market rate downtown could be several hundred-thousand dollars more than the cost of building space in the deck.

Council Member Anderson said that she could live with having the substation in the deck, if it were not financially feasible to put it somewhere else, but Council Member Stegman asked for more information about the assumption that a Police substation was needed downtown. She pointed out that the current Police headquarters was not far away and that police officers were already present and visible downtown.

Mr. Bassett mentioned that police officers and Town staff currently shared space in the Wallace Deck, and Mayor Hemminger proposed having the Police Chief share his thoughts regarding the need at the next Council meeting. She said that the Council appeared to agree with having a Parking Management office in the new deck but were not certain about the Police substation. She asked staff to determine whether the Parking office could be expanded to include the Police substation as well.

Mayor Hemminger stressed the importance of having electric vehicle conduit installed in as many places as possible. She said that the Town could always add charging stations at a later time but that running the conduit during construction was her current interest.

Mr. Bassett reminded the Council that negotiations regarding the land swap were continuing. He was still presuming that the Town's contribution would be roughly \$500,000 and did not see any reason to change that prior to moving forward, he said. With regard to a question that had been raised about an OWASA easement, Mr. Bassett said that

the appraiser did not feel the easement would change his original estimate.

Mayor pro tem Parker said he had been surprised that the Grubb property appraised higher than the Town's, since the Town property would retain utility and enable a 200,000 square-foot office building.

Mr. Bassett replied that the appraisal had been based on land value only since the feasibility of construction was still unconfirmed.

Mayor pro tem Parker confirmed with Mr. Bassett that the appraiser had given the Town a higher value per square foot based on the assumption that its land had a higher and better use than the Grubb property.

Urban Designer Michael Stevenson gave a PowerPoint update on design elements. He showed an aerial view of the site and surrounding area as well as street level views. He said that the number of EV charging stations had been doubled to 56. He showed where the Police substation and Parking Management offices could fit. He indicated where two green walls would be and noted where the building would step-down on the side facing North Street.

Mr. Stevenson discussed the advantages and disadvantages of various cladding alternatives. He showed drawings of the facade with vertical terracotta pillars that frame a series of urban bays that could be made of metal "fins", perforated metal with large-scale patterns, alternating terracotta colors, or folded perforated metal. He expressed a preference for the folded metal option and said that the Community Design Commission had liked that one as well.

Town Urban Designer Brian Peterson commented on the facade design. He noted that parking structures were typically more horizontal and said that the proposed vertical elements would introduce a more urban character. He discussed some of the options and said that the folded metal one had a certain richness and sculptural quality that would allow the building to be experienced differently from different angles.

The Council and Mr. Stevenson discussed the amount of maintenance that would be required for each of the materials and the evergreen walls and verified that there was no significant cost difference among the options. They discussed alternatives for locating the offices and agreed on the importance of hearing from the Police Chief about whether or not it would be adequate to locate the substation in another area of the deck.

Mayor Hemminger asked if the Police substation could be on the second floor above the parking office, and Mr. Stevenson replied that doing so might be a possibility.

Council Member Anderson wondered if the two offices could share a space.

Most Council Members said they liked the green wall. The majority said they preferred the folded metal panels but some were intrigued by a suggestion from Council Member Hunyh about the panels including images of famous Chapel Hill residents. Some spoke in support of moving the offices to the northeast portion of the deck but said they wanted to get an opinion from the Police Chief before making a decision.

Mr. Stevenson agreed to look at locating the offices on the northeast corner and also seeing there would be an opportunity to stack them.

This item was received as presented.

3. Recommendation of Community Members to Participate in the Town Attorney Assessment Center.

[\[20-0366\]](#)

Mayor Hemminger pointed out that the Council would only be discussing recommendations and that Item 3 would return for a vote at the next Council meeting.

Council Member Anderson reported on the process that she and Council Members Huynh and Buansi had followed to choose citizens to help with Town Attorney selection process. She said that the committee had sought age, gender, and racial diversity as well as legal expertise and/or related experience. All of the candidates had been good and the committee was pleased with the one they had chosen, she said.

This item was received as presented.

PUBLIC COMMENT*

3.01 Ben Lazarus Regarding Mask Recommendations.

[\[20-0378\]](#)

Ben Lazarus, a foreign-service officer and creator of a Facebook app called Masks for Chapel Hill, strongly urged the Mayor and Council to make wearing masks mandatory in Town. He pointed out that Orange County had had more deaths from COVID-19 than entire countries in Asia. Making masks mandatory was one of the things that the Mayor and Council could do to help save lives, Mr. Lazarus said.

3.02 Jenny McMillan Regarding Mask Recommendations.

[\[20-0379\]](#)

Jenny McMillan agreed with all that Mr. Lazarus had said. Masks had worked in the U.S. in 1918 and had been shown to work around the world, she said. She urged the Council to take care of the community by requiring masks.

3.03 Nathan Boucher Written Comment Regarding Parking Deck.

[\[20-0380\]](#)

Mayor Hemminger read an email from Nathan Boucher, a Chapel Hill

resident, who asked that any Police substation in the downtown area include a thoughtful plan for foot dissemination routes and an open door policy. The substation would be an opportunity to develop positive relations, he said.

Mr. Boucher also asked if there would be ways to involve the community in planting and seasonal upkeep of areas in Town, including the proposed East Rosemary Street Parking Deck.

ADJOURNMENT

This meeting was adjourned at 8:49 p.m.