



TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL

Town Council

Meeting Minutes - Draft

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

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

Monday, February 8, 2021 **6:00 PM** **Virtual Meeting**

Language Access Statement

For interpretation or translation services, call 919-969-5105.

ဘာသာပြန်ဆိုခြင်းနှင့် စကားပြန်ခြင်းအတွက်၊ (၉၁၉) ၉၆၉-၅၁၀၅ ကိုဖုန်းခေါ်ပါ။

Para servicios de interpretación o traducción, llame al 919-969-5105.

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919-969-5105.

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 Ann Anderson, Assistant to the Town Manager for Administrative and Program Management Ross Tompkins, Mayoral Aide Jeanne Brown, Communications and Public Affairs Director/Town Clerk Sabrina Oliver, and Deputy Town Clerk Amy Harvey.

Welcome & Agenda review [\[21-0103\]](#)

Mayor Hemminger opened the virtual Council Retreat meeting and called the roll at 6:00 p.m. All Council Members replied that they were present.

Reflecting on working together [\[21-0104\]](#)

Mayor Hemminger proposed a pilot project for the Town's petitioning process in which petitions would go to her and the Town Manager prior to being sent to Council. In response, Council Members agreed that the current system had drawbacks, but they did not all agreed that the

proposed pilot was the best way to solve that.

Council Member Ryan cautioned against creating a "gate-keeping process" and stressed that petitions needed to come to the Council for a formal vote. Council Member Buansi said he did not see a problem with the current process and he suggested looking into whether any other towns were doing it in the way the Mayor was proposing.

Council Member Stegman said that it would be fine to tweak the Council Procedures Manual, but she did not want to create a new, complicated, multi-step process. She asked to see a draft of the proposed pilot. She said that Council Members had been elected on individual platforms and that they were responsible for deciding where something should be on the priority list and whether or not it should go forward.

Mayor pro tem Parker asked if the Mayor and Manager would be making value judgments or merely fact checking. He said that it was difficult to commit to a process without knowing more about it.

Council Member Huynh said that he would like to see what was in the pipeline before agreeing to change the process. He would also want to know who would do the prioritizing and understand what criteria the Council would use for decision-making, he said.

Mayor Hemminger and Council Member Anderson pointed out that the majority of Council Members surveyed had expressed support for creating a way to allow the Council and public to know where petitions were in the process. Council Member Anderson argued that the time for debating whether or not a new process was needed was over. She pointed out that the Manager and Mayor would still continue to ask the Council whether or not to proceed.

Town Manager Maurice Jones pointed out that the processes for resolutions, proclamations, and petitions were different from each other and characterized the current system as "ludicrous". There needed to be different processes for requests, ideas, and personal opinions. The proposed process would permit a deeper analysis before bringing some request to the Council for discussion, he said.

Mayor pro tem Parker proposed that the Manager provide Council with a tutorial that would clarify how the current process worked. For example, he would like to know what staff could currently address, what needed to go through a formal process but did not require Council action, and what required a vote by the Council, he said.

Mayor Hemminger clarified that she was not suggesting that she and the Manager decide on the merits of petitions but only that they determine

what resources would be needed and recommend a pathway. She proposed that she and the Manager review the Council Procedures Manual and bring back a written recommended approach and timeline for Council consideration.

Council Members Stegman and Anderson said that, currently, the Council's packets, which contained information on resolutions, projects, and other items came to them just prior to Council meetings. They said that it was not realistic to expect a 21st century Council, many of whom had jobs and children, to work that way. Council Member Stegman said that the issue was applicable to the current discussion in which the pilot project was being proposed for the first time.

Mayor Hemminger reminded Council Members to get their questions in before meetings as well, since that helped her plan how to facilitate. She said that only about half of them copied her on questions they sent in, but she praised the manner in which the Council pulled items from the Consent Agenda. She said that Council Members who were board liaisons were responsible for those boards even though they did not have to attend every meeting.

The Council discussed having a guideline for how long each Council Member could speak and in empowering the Mayor to remind anyone who went over that limit. Council Members said that they did not each need to speak on every issue and/or repeat what others had said. Some discussed changing how Council meetings were structured and said that they wanted work sessions to focus on policy rather than overflow agenda items. They emphasized the importance of getting questions in ahead of time, being prepared, and trying to avoid repetition.

On a separate topic, Mr. Jones reminded the Council that it had begun to discuss the possibility of having a discretionary fund to address some issues. COVID-19 had interrupted that discussion, but he could look into the costs and trade-offs as part of the budget process, if the Council were still interested, he said.

Considering the size of Council & Open seat

[\[21-0105\]](#)

Town Attorney Ann Anderson explained that amending the Town charter in order to reduce the number of Council seats to seven could be done by an act of the NC General Assembly or through the following four-step Town process: adopt a resolution of intent to consider an ordinance amendment; call a public hearing on the proposed amendment; adopt the ordinance amending the charter; and publish a notice of adoption. She pointed out, however, that publishing a notice could trigger a special referendum if at least 10 percent of Town citizens requested one.

Mayor Hemminger said that the Council had previously discussed having a public process, but she was wondering if it still wanted to do so given the ongoing pandemic and need for virtual meetings. Council Members ascertained from Mr. Jones that the type of public process they had initially envisioned would entail four or five public input sessions, outreach, and check-ins. Attorney Anderson said that such a process would need to be completed by the filing deadline of July 2, 2021, and several Council Members said there was not enough time for it.

Some Council Members proposed letting the public decide the issue in a referendum during the November 2021 Town election, but others pointed out that the percentage of citizens who typically vote in those elections was small. After more discussion, the Mayor and Council concurred that the timing was off and it was unlikely that everything necessary could be accomplished before the July 2, 2021, deadline.

Council Members discussed whether they should try to fill an existing vacant Council seat before the end of June, but Council Members Buansi and Parker said they would only support that if there would be enough time to open the process up and accept new applicants. The Council ultimately decided to not try and fill the vacant seat during an election year in which four Council seats were open.

The Council agreed that the current process for filling vacancies was vague and confusing. They asked Ms. Anderson to bring back ideas for updating the Town ordinance, and Mayor Hemminger proposed having another meeting on the subject when Ms. Anderson had more information.

Council Member Buansi left the meeting at 8:19 p.m.

Closing out the retreat

[\[21-0106\]](#)

Facilitator Maggie Chotas reviewed the topics that the Council had discussed during the three-day retreat. Council Members put comments about the three sessions into a chat box and she read some of those aloud.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:21 p.m.