

TO: Mayor and Town Council

FROM: Renuka Soll, Chair, Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Commission

SUBJECT: Petition to the Town Council regarding Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Commission Realignment

DATE: June 6, 2024

This petition is in response to the changes of the Town Boards and Commission, particularly the Parks Greenways and Recreation Commission.

Last year, Town Staff recommended changes to boards and commission practices, including having seven members, consistent membership practices, consistent terms of office, and a consistent agenda structure. They also recommended that the boards define chair, vice chair, and liaison roles, meet four times during the Chapel Hill Town Council session from September to June, and receive Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training.

The Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Commission plays a crucial role in advising the Council and staff on how to best serve the citizens of Chapel Hill in matters related to parks, recreation, trails, open space, and cemeteries. Their commitment to improving our community's quality of life and health is admirable. With a strong team of ten members, the Commission is unwavering in its mission to ensure our community has access to high-quality, diverse, and innovative recreational, leisure, and cultural facilities and programs that are safe, affordable, and accessible. With this in mind, the Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Commission recommends the following.

1. Membership Size – The Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Commissioners serve as a voice for the community and extend outreach to their network within Chapel Hill and Orange County regarding the Parks and Recreation Department events, programs, and projects. The Commission, with its ten members, including one representative for Orange County and one from the Town's Youth Council (a non-voting member), proposes that the number of members remain unchanged. This ten-member structure fosters diversity, inclusion, and equity in the membership, with each representative bringing unique perspectives and viewpoints on community needs.

Also, as liaisons to other boards and commissions, the Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Commissioners learn about different activities and developments within Chapel Hill and can suggest opportunities for collaboration and/or joint meetings on relevant items between the boards.

2. Consistent Terms of Office
3. Consistent Agenda Structure—The Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Commission's agenda is consistent in format and provides notes and updates on events, programs, and projects the Department oversees. We recommend continued use of this agenda structure

as it allows for the information needed to keep members up to date and helps with the commissioner's advocacy role and community outreach.

4. Clear definitions for Board Chair, Vice Chair, and Liaison Roles and Responsibilities
5. Number of meetings – The Parks, Greenways and Recreation Commission advocates for nine meetings a year. This number allows for a summer break in alignment with the Town Council and a Winter holiday break. Given that the Parks and Recreation Department is providing services to the community 365 days a year, it is crucial to have nine meetings to keep the Commissioners informed of the activities, programs, and projects being provided by the Department. Commission meetings serve as a platform to gather community input and feedback on land acquisition, development, improvement, and programming. Reducing the number of meetings to four would necessitate longer meeting times and would not provide sufficient detail for members to understand the breadth of services the Department is involved in and their communications with the public.
6. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Training

Through our work with Town staff, including year-round participation, membership diversity, equity, inclusion, and size, the Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Commission has successfully worked with the public and advocated for the Parks and Recreation Department to the Town Council members, particularly for additional funding for repairs and capital improvement projects.