



TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL

Town Council

Meeting Minutes - Draft

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

Mayor Jessica Anderson
Mayor pro tem Amy Ryan
Council Member Camille Berry
Council Member Melissa McCullough
Council Member Paris Miller-Foushee

Council Member Theodore Nollert
Council Member Adam Searing
Council Member Elizabeth Sharp
Council Member Karen Stegman

Monday, September 23, 2024 **6:00 PM** **Library, Room B**

Language Access Statement

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

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

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919-969-5105.

In-Person Meeting Notification

View the Meeting

- Public attendance is welcome, and limited to room capacity
- We will not live stream the event, but will provide the Post-Meeting Video <https://www.townofchapelhill.org/councilvideo/>
- The Town of Chapel Hill wants to know more about who participates in its programs and processes, including Town Council meetings.
- Participate in a voluntary demographic survey before viewing online or in person - <https://www.townofchapelhill.org/demosurvey>

Parking and Entry

- Parking is available at the Library lots. The Library is served by CL Route, D Route, and GoTriangle Routes of Chapel Hill Transit
- Meeting Room B is to the right from the main entrance.
- Please do not bring signs.

ROLL CALL

Council Members Nollert, Stegman, and Berry attended the meeting remotely.

Present: 9 - Mayor Jessica Anderson, Mayor pro tem Amy Ryan, Council Member Camille Berry, Council Member Paris Miller-Foushee, Council Member Adam Searing, Council Member Karen Stegman, Council Member Theodore Nollert, Council Member Melissa McCullough, and Council Member Elizabeth Sharp

OTHER ATTENDEES

Town Manager Chris Blue, Deputy Town Manager Mary Jane Nirdlinger, Deputy Town Manager Loryn Clark, Town Attorney Ann Anderson, Executive Director for Strategic Communications and Marketing Susan Brown, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer Shenekia Weeks, Community Relations Manager Shay Stevens, Media Relations Manager Alex Carrasquillo, Officer Britt, Deputy Town Clerk Amy Harvey, Assistant Town Clerk Brenton Hodge and Governance Services Director/Town Clerk Sabrina Oliver.

OPENING

Mayor Jessica Anderson opened the work session at 6:00 p.m. She pointed out that Agenda Item 2 had been postponed to Spring 2025.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY COUNCIL MEMBERS

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Continued Discussion about Boards/Commissions and Equitable Community Engagement [\[24-0458\]](#)

Director of Strategic Communications Susan Brown began the staff's presentation, which was in response to a Spring 2024 request from the Council for more information on a public engagement strategy. She displayed a list of Town boards and commissions (B&Cs), which excluded the Community Design Commission because it was part of the Town's Land Use Management Ordinance.

Ms. Brown said that Town staff had not heard a clear consensus from the Council on its preferred approach to B&Cs going forward. Therefore, the staff presentation would facilitate a Council discussion of three possible models for obtaining more diverse community input, she said. She acknowledged that discussing whether or not traditional B&Cs fit modern understandings of equitable engagement was difficult. Rebalancing power structures was never easy, she said.

Some Council Members proposed that the conversation focus more on the nature of B&Cs' tasks. Some said that the Council's conversation should focus on what it wanted to accomplish through community engagement and the values that should inform that decision. Council Members spoke about the value of having B&Cs with community expertise, but some proposed examining whether B&Cs could also be barriers to setting community engagement criteria.

Media Relations Manager Alex Carrasquillo gave a PowerPoint overview of staff's strategic approach to communications. He described a weekly newsletter that included engagement opportunities, talked about a new website, and discussed a greater investment in advertising through flyers, 30-second radio spots and local news. Such improvements would offer more and better ways to inform residents about what was happening in Town and how they could become involved, he said.

Engagement Manager Rebecca Buzzard said that staff had been scaling up a Town-wide engagement approach that was rooted in equity. She reviewed best practices for public participation planning and gave examples of how staff had been working on that with Town departments. The goal was to make equitable engagement a part of Town planning processes, she said. She mentioned several new tools, programs and approaches that would help build relationships with historically under-engaged residents, but cautioned, that such tools would not necessarily work if current barriers to participation remain high.

Mayor Anderson and Ms. Buzzard agreed that reimbursing residents for participation could be a huge incentive.

Community Relations Manager Shay Stevens proposed that Council Members talk about times when their individual perspectives or decisions had changed as a result of community engagement or public input.

Council Member McCollough talked about having heard a board member who was an energy expert make a non-factual statement. Council Member Berry explained how she had been moved by an InterFaith Council staff member's first-hand testimony during a funding discussion. Mayor pro tem Ryan described a powerful planning meeting regarding Legion Road in which pro and con groups listened to each other in a community-facilitated dialogue. Council Member Searing recalled a debate at state level regarding the Children's Health Insurance Program in which a doctor provided expert testimony and a mother shared her personal experience. The combination of those two testimonies was what led to a change, he said. Mayor pro tem Anderson spoke about when she heard Rogers Road residents speak about what they wanted for their community.

Ms. Stevens pointed out that Council Members, the Town Manager and Town staff all pull from a mix of experience and expertise to make informed decisions. She mentioned other common sources of input as well, such as adopted plans, research and data, best practices and trends, technical analysis, diversity, equity and inclusion input, and residents' perspectives through formal and informal public participation.

Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Officer Shenekia Weeks asked the Council to comment on the advantages and challenges associated with three models for public participation: B&Cs; taskforces & workgroups; and

ad hoc committees.

Council Members said that the advantages of B&Cs included: building a working relationship over time; building institutional knowledge; providing expertise or knowledge; being a dress rehearsal for developer applicants; serving as a possible training ground for those who want to run for Council; members serving as "ambassadors" to the public on certain topics; helping the Council think about policy; being a standing pool of people to consult; allowing innovation and new ideas to come forward; including engaged people who choose to serve.

The Council noted the following challenges associated with B&Cs: having an incomplete feedback loop from Council to B&Cs; being counterproductive when a board's goal is to push back on the Council's direction; having only a few members serve for many years thereby hoarding engagement; being heavy on staff time and resources; being difficult for less well-educated residents to serve; risking scope creep; attempting to oversee staff work. Some Council Members talked about implicit biases among some board members. Some said that some boards struggled with focus.

Mayor pro tem Ryan commented that boards' charges had been ill-defined and should be more specific. Council Member Searing proposed not giving up on residents who had taken the time to participate. It could be difficult to recruit people for Town boards considering the low number of residents who vote in Town elections, he said.

Others Council Members argued that B&Cs were fundamentally flawed and said that the current structure would not be able to achieve the goal of obtaining broader community input. Council Member Stegman said that boards could be a closed circle in which current members recommended new ones. Council Member Miller-Foushee mentioned the difficulty of trying to create an equitable system from one that was not designed with equity in mind.

The Council discussed the benefits and challenges of working with taskforces, work groups, and ad hoc committees. They said that advantages included: a level of clarity regarding goals, timeframes and deadlines; an opportunity for the Council to define the range of perspectives they include. Council Members said that such groups could be easier than B&Cs because they allowed for more people and time and could apply pertinent expertise to specific problems. They could be more nimble and timely, and they often were more focused because they had a defined outcome, the Council said.

The Council pointed out that challenges could include framing the charge, scope creep, and the need for clear expectations that include an end date. Council Members noted the need to complete the communication

loop by letting group members know which recommendations had been adopted and how they would be implemented. The need to finding outside resources to address some issues could be challenging, they pointed out. They commented on the inefficiency of having to start from zero with a new group every time.

Finally, Council Members discussed the advantages and disadvantages of having Town staff handle community engagement. Advantages included staff members having a broad range and depth of abilities and understanding, they said. They pointed out that staff routinely built relationships with the public and said that having staff members reach out could have a positive effect on how the community feels about its local government. The Council said that staff would be able to survey residents where they were and that staff members already understood how to address barriers, such as language. Staff could set up a form of engagement that would be responsive and inclusive and would capture both lived experience and academic expertise, they said.

The Council spoke about challenges that included: having personal stories filtered through staff to Council; being unable to reach everyone; needing to build trust; missing out on potential Council questions; being less able than the Council to manage politically charged situations.

Town Manager Chris Blue said that equitable engagement was systems work. Despite the Town's best effort to increase diversity, trying to do so had been like putting a band aid on a system that was fundamentally flawed, he said. Explaining that the current discussion would inform staff's recommendations, he asked Council Members to express a preference for one of three options: 1) Maintaining all B&Cs; 2) Reducing the number of B&Cs; 3) Disbanding all B&Cs.

Mayor Anderson chose Option 2. Council Members Searing, Ryan, Sharp and Berry chose a combination of Options 2 and 3. Council Members Miller-Foushee, Nollert and Stegman and chose Option 3, and Council Member McCollough spoke in favor of Option 3, but with the possibility of adding back.

Town Attorney Ann Anderson pointed out that eliminating, reducing or changing B&Cs' charges would require a new piece of law in the Town's code. The Council could not pass a single resolution to eliminate all boards and would need to decide on each board separately, she explained. She said that the current meeting was an opportunity for Council members to say whether or not they were interested in having staff return with a proposed process for reducing boards.

This item was received as presented.

2. Rewriting Our Rules - A Land Use Management Ordinance

[\[24-0459\]](#)

(LUMO) Update

This matter was deferred to Spring 2025.

ADJOURNMENT

This meeting was adjourned 8:22 p.m.