



TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL

Town Council

Meeting Minutes - Final

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

Mayor Pam Hemminger
Mayor pro tem Jessica Anderson
Council Member Donna Bell
Council Member Allen Buansi
Council Member Hongbin Gu

Council Member Nancy Oates
Council Member Michael Parker
Council Member Rachel Schaevitz
Council Member Karen Stegman

Wednesday, October 16, 2019

6:30 PM

Library Meeting Room A

Roll Call

Present: 9 - Mayor Pam Hemminger, Mayor pro tem Jessica Anderson, Council Member Donna Bell, Council Member Allen Buansi, Council Member Hongbin Gu, Council Member Nancy Oates, Council Member Michael Parker, Council Member Rachel Schaevitz, and Council Member Karen Stegman

Other Attendees

Town Manager Maurice Jones, Deputy Town Manager Florentine Miller, Town Attorney Ralph Karpinos, Housing and Community Executive Director Loryn Clark, Transit Director Brian Litchfield, Transit Development Manager Matt Cecil, Mayoral Aide Jeanne Brown, Transportation Planning Manager Bergen Watterson, Patrol Captain Donnie Rhoads, Interim Director of Planning Judy Johnson, Affordable Housing Manager Nate Broman-Fulks, Communications and Public Affairs Director and Town Clerk Sabrina Oliver.

AGENDA ITEMS

0.01 Mayor pro tem Anderson Regarding Public Meeting for Christ Community Church.

[\[19-0868\]](#)

Mayor pro tem Anderson opened the meeting at 6:30 p.m. She said that Mayor Hemminger was at a Climate Leaders meeting and would arrive later.

Mayor pro tem Anderson announced that a public meeting regarding a Christ Community Church special-use permit request would be held on October 17th at 5:15 p.m. at Town Hall.

0.02 Mayor pro tem Anderson Regarding Public Workshop on 15-501 Corridor Study.

[\[19-0869\]](#)

Mayor pro tem Anderson said that a public workshop regarding a multi-modal infrastructure between Ephesus Church Road and University Drive would be held from 6:00-8:00 p.m. on October 17th at Chapel Hill

Bible Church on Erwin Road.

0.03 Mayor pro tem Anderson Regarding Public Information Meeting on Blue Hill Massing.

[\[19-0870\]](#)

Mayor pro tem Anderson announced a public information meeting on proposed improvements to Blue Hill District massing to be held on October 21st from 5:15 to 6:30 p.m. at Town Hall.

0.04 Mayor pro tem Anderson Regarding Haunted Hill.

[\[19-0871\]](#)

Mayor pro tem Anderson noted that the Town's annual Halloween event would occur on the coming weekend at the Town Community Center.

0.05 Mayor pro tem Anderson Regarding Chapel Hill Historical Society Celebration of Howard and Lillian Lee.

[\[19-0872\]](#)

Mayor pro tem Anderson said that the Chapel Hill Historical Society would celebrate Town residents Howard and Lilian Lee at the Binkley Baptist Church on Sunday, October 20th.

1. North-South Bus Rapid Transit Traffic Analysis.

[\[19-0854\]](#)

Transit Development Manager Matt Cecil gave a PowerPoint presentation on the proposed North-South Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line. He provided background on the project, outlined a traffic analysis, and discussed the potential for doing a full road conversion. Staff had shared its preliminary results with the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NC DOT), which controlled that corridor, he said.

Mr. Cecil said that the Town had applied for a Federal Transit Authority (FTA) rating on August 23, 2019 and hoped to receive that in late fall. He said that the 30 percent design plans would be presented to the FTA for review and feedback. Mayor pro tem Anderson confirmed with him that there would be no financial impact on the Town at that stage.

Kevin Bauman, a traffic engineer with Kimley Horn & Associates, reviewed options for converting a lane versus constructing one at two specific intersections: Cameron Avenue/Columbia Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard/Estes Drive. He said that engineers had identified the Columbia Street/Cameron Avenue intersection as a choke point for both buses and vehicles if a lane were eliminated there. He described a potential alternative that would have both vehicles and buses using two traffic lanes in that vicinity.

Mr. Bauman then described what a typical morning commute would look like through the Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard/Estes Drive intersection if one lane were converted for BRT. For general purpose vehicles, conversion would more than double travel times in both directions while construction

would leave travel times as they were, he said.

Mr. Bauman said that the current conversation was about trade-offs such as possible delays in travel times for vehicles versus potential time benefits for those on the bus. He directed the Council's attention to the level of service predictions for regular vehicles and pointed out that the conversion scenario would put traffic in an unacceptable range in some locations. The Estes Drive intersection, for example, would go from Level D to Level F at peak hours, he said.

The Council confirmed with Mr. Bauman that the analysis was based on existing traffic and did not take future growth into account. They also confirmed that converting an outside bus lane to a general purpose lane would leave the Cameron/Columbia area as it currently was, with no exclusive bike lane on that portion of road. The Council verified that conversion would increase travel time for cars but could save time on the BRT by one or two minutes in some areas. Mr. Bauman said that both options included sidewalks, bike lanes, and signalized crossings.

Jeff Koontz, representing AECOM, said that widening the road in some areas would create some challenges but that planners had not yet spent much time looking at the level of detail that would be involved.

Mayor Hemminger arrived at 7:06 p.m.

Council members verified with Mr. Bauman that NC DOT had indicated that service levels of E and F would be unacceptable to them. They pointed out, however, that the worst case scenario assumed that citizens would not change their behavior and use alternative transportation.

The Council asked for more information about the effects of BRT in other parts of the country and how many people could reasonably be expected to change their mode of transportation.

Mr. Cecil pointed out that the Town's existing passenger load in the N-S BRT corridor was about 6,000 riders per day, which was about 12 percent beyond capacity. Projections for opening day of BRT was about 7,500 people, and that number would be closer to 12,000 within 10 years, he said. Mr. Cecil said that a required NC DOT analysis that was currently underway would provide specific information. Alternatives for future development and growth would be part of a future traffic analysis, he pointed out.

Mr. Koontz explained the differences between construction and conversion from a design point of view. He displayed pictures that showed different potentials at the same location but with different scenarios. Bike and pedestrian improvements were inherent in either design, he said.

Council members verified that lanes could not be narrower than 11 feet, due to safety issues, and that any decision to lower the speed limit would have to come from NC DOT. They also confirmed that right-of-ways would be needed with either option. The Council encouraged planners to think about operational changes, such as having reversible lanes rather than laying more asphalt. An idea was raised about prioritizing buses at peak hours to see if that would improve traffic conditions, but Mr. Cecil pointed out that there might not be enough time to do that before applying for federal funds in the spring.

Mr. Bauman said that planners had been evaluating options for improving signal timing and had found that timing changes alone would not make conversion all the way through downtown acceptable from an operational standpoint.

The Council asked for staff to bring back "what if" scenarios, such as what level of service would actually get people out of cars and using an alternate mode of transportation. They asked for details on the potential for adding more bike lanes along the UNC campus route. The Council confirmed that staff was working on the economic development/place-making aspect of BRT.

2. Overview of Rental Development Finance.

[\[19-0855\]](#)

Executive Director for Housing and Community Loryn Clark introduced Real Estate and Finance Professor David Hartzell, of the UNC Kenan-Flagler School of Business, to give a presentation on the rental development principles and factors that private developers consider when evaluating a potential project, and how affordable housing interests impact their decisions.

In a PowerPoint presentation, Dr. Hartzell analyzed a hypothetical development project, beginning with the stage of making assumptions and projections. The two most important factors that developers look at are market value and potential profits, he said. Using the case of a market-rate, multiple family rental project, he explained how a developer would consider zoning regulations, cost of land, construction costs, interest rates, potential leverage, operating expenses, expected vacancy rate, leverage, potential income, and more. A developer's goal would be to minimize costs at the beginning and minimize time once the land has been purchased, he said.

Dr. Hartzell said that developers look at whether or not a project would compensate him/her for the risk. He addressed how Town interests in affordable housing (AH) impact those decisions, and said that developers prefer the certainty of a payment in lieu to the uncertainty of having their AH contribution based on rents, which might change in the future.

Council members confirmed with Dr. Hartzell that the developers' comfort with AH was related to how comfortable they were with their original assumptions. An appropriate payment in lieu would be derived on what the developer would need to pay an equity investor as a percent return, he said.

The Council confirmed with Dr. Hartzell that any developer would spend his/her own money early on and that most would include that in their construction budgets. It was "fairly likely" that they would be paid back later on, he said. A Council member asked how costs and benefits related to the Town were calculated, and Dr. Hartzell recommended contacting the UNC School of Government for such information.

Mayor Hemminger mentioned Town efforts to attract commercial developers while resisting luxury apartment projects, and Dr. Hartzell replied that developers prefer more density because it reduces the cost of land. Mayor Hemminger asked if there was an equation that the Council should look at differently for middle housing, and Council Member Parker replied that land in Chapel Hill was being priced at what developers assume they could do with it rather than what it was actually zoned for.

Council Member Parker asked if stating that the Town would not make zoning changes might drive land prices down, and Dr. Hartzell replied that land sellers had an intrinsic feel for what their properties were worth.

3. Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation - From Idea to Project.

[\[19-0856\]](#)

Transportation Planning Manager Bergen Watterson gave a PowerPoint presentation on current bike and pedestrian projects, funding streams, the Town's implementation process, and allocations. She provided status updates on projects at Estes Drive, Old Durham-Chapel Hill Road, Fordham Boulevard, Homestead and Sewell School Roads, the Bolin Creek Greenway, the Morgan Creek Greenway, the Morgan Creek Bridge, and others. The Town prioritized implementation according to several of its adopted plans, she said.

Ms. Watterson stated that NC DOT's updated Complete Streets process should speed up those projects that provide the best level of safety and connectivity. She pointed out that the Town sometimes received infrastructure enhancements along with development projects and/or when NC DOT resurfaced roads.

In response to a question from the Council regarding public comments related to Bolin Creek, Ms. Watterson said that staff and management were going through those comments and would take them into consideration. Mayor Hemminger and Council Member Parker commented on the benefits of being able to have shovel-ready projects, since the federal government had put a timeline on spending and could reclaim

unspent funds. Mayor Hemminger said that the Town had recently benefited from having had a few of those projects.

Ms. Watterson said that NC DOT would build projects that were on a Town-adopted plan on any state road as part of a highway project, and at no cost to the Town. If a project were not in an adopted plan, but there was an obvious need for it, NC DOT would develop a cost-sharing arrangement, she said.

The Council and Ms. Watterson discussed Town projects that might be eligible such as the Weaver Dairy/Interstate 40 change-up, NC 54, and NC 15-501. They discussed how NC DOT would not do projects that were exclusively bike and pedestrian, however.

Ms. Watterson said that the primary funding sources for bike and pedestrian projects came from the federal government through NC DOT, the Metropolitan Planning Organization, and Town bond funds. She provided background on the Town's experience with funding sources and mentioned that there were many requirements attached to federal funding.

The Council and Town Manager Maurice Jones discussed how having annual Town funds available for small projects such as re-striping roads, would be part of upcoming Town discussions regarding its five-year budget strategy.

Ms. Watterson indicated on a handout the breakdown of projects that had received bond funds. Projects had been coming in much higher than had been estimated, and the Town was not even receiving bids on some of the smaller ones, she said. She said that staff received a constant stream of requests to do small projects, such as safety improvements.

Ms. Watterson explained that issues impacting bike and pedestrian implementation included lack of an annual dedicated funding stream, federal funding being difficult to obtain, and including many restrictions that requiring staff time and resources. She pointed out that striping was typically done when roads were being resurfaced.

Ms. Watterson said that staff had been looking at the possibility of reallocating lanes on West Franklin Street, as the Downtown Partnership had recently requested. There would be an opportunity to do so in May-August 2020 when NC DOT would be resurfacing that area, she said. In order to qualify, the Town would need to provide NC DOT with a current traffic analysis and engineering drawings, which would cost between \$35,000 and \$50,000, she said. Ms. Watterson said that the application deadline would be April 1st, since the approval process would take about four months. The estimated cost of doing that project without NC DOT

was \$500,000, she pointed out.

Mayor Hemminger said that the Town had good relations with NC DOT, which had recently found money outside its own budget to do a bike and pedestrian project in Town. She expressed strong support for going ahead with the study and updating the Town's plan. West Franklin Street was like a freeway, and the Town needed to do something better there, she said.

Council members confirmed that there was a chance NC DOT would not agree, even after the Town had invested in a traffic study. There would still be resurfacing and striping done, but it might not be what the Town desired, Ms. Watterson said. Council members commented on the "perennial conflict" of having a 25 MPH speed limit on Franklin Street, which really was a four-lane highway. They confirmed that staff was working on finding safer options for delivery trucks to park on Rosemary Street, and they recommended that staff include that issue in its report to NC DOT.

The Council confirmed that staff had been doing a trial run on a stretch of Cameron Avenue, and Mr. Jones stressed the need for publicity regarding such changes. In response to a question from Council about how long it would take to do a mobility plan, Mr. Jones said that the Town needed to discuss things holistically with its five-year plan and develop a way to get there. The Council confirmed with him that temporary striping could be done in some areas to provide data on how it actually works, and several Council members expressed interest in doing that.

Mayor Hemminger confirmed that the consensus of Council was to have staff bring the West Franklin Street traffic study forward at a future Council meeting in order to get bids and make NC DOT's April 1, 2020 deadline.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:33 p.m.