TOWN OF HUNTERSVILLE
SPECIAL TOWN BOARD MEETING
MINUTES

April 29, 2024
5:00 P.M. – Huntersville Town Hall
101 Huntersville-Concord Road

The Huntersville Board of Commissioners held a Special Meeting at Huntersville Town Hall, 101 Huntersville-Concord Road, Huntersville, NC, at 5:00 p.m. on April 29, 2024, to discuss the proposed budget for FY25.

Mayor Clark called the Special Meeting to order.

GOVERNING BODY MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Christy Clark; Commissioners Alisia Bergsman, Amanda Dumas, Jennifer Hunt, Edwin Quarles, LaToya Rivers and Nick Walsh.

Anthony Roberts, Town Manager, reviewed the Draft of the Manager's Recommended Budget. *Refer to PowerPoint attached hereto as Exhibit No. 1.*

Commissioner Dumas said I tried to drive around and get an idea of the projects that I wasn't as familiar with and when it comes to the Ferrelltown Parkway, clearly our most expensive expense this coming year, I think I'd like to know more about that. There's still a ton of construction happening and houses out there. I wonder if there's a better way to prioritize that. It feels like that one might be able to be waited on, but I don't know.

Stephen Trott, Director of Engineering, said I'm going to talk in general about the project and hopefully get maybe some more specific details on it. Ferrelltown Parkway goes north and south. The portion south of Keyes Meadow is the part that was built by the development. The remaining part was not. Only right-of-way was set aside as part of that when that rezoning was approved. Originally, I think back when the rezoning was initially submitted, the whole road was in there but during the rezoning process a portion of it was removed. The project we are working on is to finish Ferrelltown Parkway as it was envisioned through the development. There's right-of-way that would be set aside by the developer for that, so there's no homes kind of in the middle of where the road would go. They are spread out to the sides on that, and so the project would extend that two lanes with turn lanes as needed through the development and then also up there on Ramah Church Road. There's utilities. There's overhead, underground, probably name it, it's out there along Ramah Church Road, and so that also has to be relocated as part of it. This is not a short section of the road. There's no road out there to widen, so it would be all new road for the Ferrelltown part and then widening and improving Ramah Church.

Commissioner Dumas said I'm not arguing that we don't need it. I guess I'm wondering if it needs to happen next year or if it can wait, just because there's a way to get to Ramah Church from this neighborhood. There's not a lot of density in regards to the homes out there and so we are spending a significant amount of money on something where we have so much pain points everywhere else. If you could prioritize, would you think this is a higher priority.

Mr. Trott said do you want traffic commuting through a local street in a neighborhood or would you rather them use a thoroughfare, which this will be a minor thoroughfare, so there won't be any homes with driveways on Ferrelltown Parkway. This will be more of a traffic mover, not a major highway, so instead of people taking Fred Brown and coming through those local streets they would use this to get from place to place. Also, the homes are being built out there. It's a good time to also build the road before everything kind of gets built up and established.

Commissioner Bergsman said I do have a question tied into Ferrelltown because one of the things I was wondering, it looks like the majority of the cost of the project is in the budget for next year and I'm kind of wondering why it's not……like what's making it not more spread out, like why is it all possibly coming through at the same time.

Mr. Trott said what we have been doing over the past couple of years is working on the design and coordinating with utilities. That's a lower cost but takes a long period of time. Now we are getting to the point where most of that has been done. Now the bigger expense of right-of-way, paying for the utilities and construction, is that big expense at the end. If a project takes four years to deliver, three-quarters of that cost is in that last year when it's being delivered, so you're spending just a little bit of money spread out over the first few years to get up to that point and then that last year for construction. That's why it's a whole lot at the very end.

Mr. Roberts said that's a bond project, so obviously if we're going for bonds for the project then ultimately we are borrowing that money up front. Now there's no way Stephen is going to finish that project all in one year, but we are borrowing the money so that's the reason to frontload it like that. We can put it in the CIP and spread it out, but you're technically borrowing the money and so we pump it in at that point in time.

Commissioner Dumas said in regard to the Holbrook to Dallas connection, are we able to save the trees that are currently there or will we be losing additional trees.

Mr. Roberts said the Holbrook Street to Dallas Street, those trees should be out of the way. That's where a house was right behind Aldi in that little section. I don't know if we are affecting any more trees. If they can stay, we'll let them stay.

Commissioner Dumas said the North Meck Park playground replacement, I was curious about what all is involved with that project.

Michael Jaycocks, Parks & Recreation Director, said that playground is about 16-17 years old. Some of the decks are starting to deteriorate a little bit, so we like to replace them before they get too bad. All the new playgrounds we are doing, we are doing the poured in place rubber surfacing. It's more handicapped accessible, so more ramps and so forth. The more ramps you do, the more steel structure, the more the cost goes up.

Commissioner Bergsman asked about the rationale of adding the parking lot expansion at Holbrook Park now rather than having it combined with the park expansion as a whole.

Mr. Jaycocks said we really don't know when the future park expansion can happen or if it will ever happen, based on availability of purchasing the land. With having two more pickleball courts and with the traffic out there now, we felt that the parking was probably more of a need now than later.

Commissioner Bergsman requested confirmation that the North Mecklenburg High School crosswalk is included since it's not on the list.

Mr. Roberts said proposals for that crosswalk will be presented to the Board at the second meeting in May. We're funding that crosswalk out of FY24.

Commissioner Bergsman expressed concern that the budget doesn't include multi-use paths.

Mr. Roberts said if there are side paths that the Board wants to put in, we'd be all for that. Staff met the other day on looking at whether we can convert some of these areas from sidewalks to side paths, so we are looking at that now. We'll be meeting with Stephen on that to see if there's some options to do that if we haven't already designed, engineered, bought right-of-way for it. The problem with some of these plans, we have a change it feels like every year. One time it's a 5' then it's a 6', then it goes from no bike lanes on the street to side paths, so we are modifying our plans as we move forward. If it's not too late in the game and we haven't already purchased right-of-way on it and designed it and it's one to be converted to a side path, then we would do that. But if there are other side paths out there that you think are very high up on the list that we need to do, I don't think Jackie will slow you down.

Commissioner Bergsman asked how many feet of new sidewalk will $500,000 get us.

Mr. Trott said not a whole lot. To give you just some comparison, the Huntington Green sidewalk project that's under construction, that's a little over a mile of sidewalk and you are in the $4.5 million to $5 million range. These are your smaller, shorter connections – maybe a couple hundred feet here, a couple hundred feet there that we have to do minimal grading, minimal property acquisition. If you really want to do lots of side paths and make some larger connections, it will take some significant dollars to make those happen.

Commissioner Hunt asked if the hotel could chip into the cost of the Arahova Drive roundabout.

Mr. Trott said the roundabout needs to be upgraded. There's a new connection to the Food Lion shopping center that's out there. There's a back way to get out and the large trucks that can come out of that now can come out this way to get to the new traffic signal that will be going in there by the credit union and so to make sure that those trucks can get through there, the roundabout needs to be modified to accommodate for those larger vehicles.

Commissioner Hunt asked what the end goal was for the 115/McCord to NC 73 project.

Mr. Trott said that project is a project that the Town applied for CRTPO dollars and it's to widen existing 115 between 73 and McCord. This project would make it four-lane divided and then add bike accommodations on both sides of the road through that whole section. I guess the ask is to get started on that. We've been allocated the funding, but we haven't started on that one yet. This is probably a 6 to 8 year type duration of project to go through because of the process and also the federal process and dollars associated with it.

Commissioner Rivers asked where the Waymer Park splash pad would be located in relation to the parking lot expansion.

Mr. Jaycocks said it will be in that flat area up above the basketball courts.

Commissioner Bergsman asked what's our current size of the police fleet.

Chief Graham said 110 vehicles.

Commissioner Dumas requested clarification that the Town has had the same number of positions within the police force since 2017.

Mr. Roberts said we've added positions, but not Town funded. CMPD patrolled outside of the Town limits and when we took that over someone had to patrol it, so Mecklenburg County decided to contract with us and to be able to provide service out there we hired additional officers to patrol those areas. They paid for that.

Ms. Huffman noted it has been difficult for us to fill sworn positions, so we have added several non-sworn positions and the victim's advocate positions are examples of non-sworn positions we've added. As you can imagine, we've added many residents since 2017, but to not have added any officers, the officer count per 1,000 residents has declined.

Mr. Roberts said if we look at the sort of generic population numbers, we're 38 to 45 behind. I couldn't hire that even if I wanted to, so 10 is realistic. Hopefully we can hire 10. This is the first time we have been full in a long time.

Commissioner Quarles asked are you fully staffed on your non-sworn positions.

Chief Graham said we filled in all of our positions, so we are full all the way around.

Commissioner Walsh asked if the minimum salary for starting officers is included as part of the pay study.

Mr. Roberts said every employee is involved. I think some of the ranges for police officers will be moving.

Commissioner Quarles said looking at this with the proposed 22.75 tax rate, that would still have us lower than some of our neighboring communities if I'm not mistaken.

Ms. Huffman said Cornelius has a lower tax rate, but Davidson does not and Charlotte does not. The average tax rate of the Top 20 North Carolina municipalities in population is 50.8 cents, so we'd still be less than half of the average.

Commissioner Bergsman requested a breakdown be provided at the next budget meeting of the monthly tax impact for a low, medium and high valued home. Also, how challenging would it be for Huntersville to have a tax assistance relief program like Davidson, so residents who are on fixed incomes and at our lowest economic or income brackets may have some form of assistance.

Ms. Huffman said if the law allows Davidson to do it, I don't know why the law wouldn't allow us to do it. Having said that, we prepared the budget thus far based a 22.75 tax rate for all taxpayers. If we're going to change that for some and make it lower, then to generate the same amount of revenue it would be higher for some people. We've got colleagues in Davidson that will return our calls, so we'll figure out how to implement it.

Mr. Roberts said we'll do some research and make a couple of calls to Davidson to see how that process works, how many actual people were impacted. Obviously, it would be different here, but maybe we could find out what their policy is.

Commissioner Walsh said I believe Davidson is doing it with donations and not town funds.

Ms. Huffman said by statute we have to charge every residential/commercial taxpayer the same rate and so if they have a rebate program, that's going to be different. We should make sure all of our taxpayers know that Mecklenburg County has an elderly exemption, homestead exemption related to farms, and I believe there is some assistance for Veterans.

Commissioner Bergsman said have there been any major increases and what we are paying for Medic.

Mr. Roberts said we receive some funds for calls. We're first responders, so we get some funds for that. It's a small amount of funds that we get from the county. It's $100,000, and we get some supplies based on our supplies that we use up that are funded or given back to us. There has been conversation between the managers that the funding structure is antiquated and old and needs to be updated. We have proposed to the county manager that we need to relook at that formula.

Ms. Huffman said Medic has made a cost per call payment to the fire department and now that the fire department is effectively folding into the Town, we've worked through the application process for those funds in FY25 to come to the Town. I don't anticipate an issue, but those Medic funds have not traditionally come to the Town, but they will in the future now that we have the fire department directly.

Mr. Roberts noted that non-profit funding is not included in the budget and will be handled separately by budget amendment in the July timeframe, which allows any members of the Board that are involved in those non-profits to recuse themselves.

Commissioner Walsh requested $150,000 be added to the budget so that we show that Huntersville is making a commitment to attainable housing. How we ultimately spend that money will be determined at a later point. We've been meeting as a group and have some ideas, but I would like personally to see us put a stake in the ground and make a statement of behalf of Huntersville.

It was the general consensus of the Board to include $150,000 in the budget for attainable housing.

Mayor Clark said do we have any kind of estimate on what the non-profit requests are going to be.

Mr. Roberts said I would say it's probably $250,000 max.

Commissioner Dumas noted that Holbrook Park did not have a bike rack and asked if there is something we can do to incent people to purchase a bike.

Mr. Roberts said there are grant programs that we have done, but those are typically bikes for folks who need bikes or bike helmets. We'll do a little research before May 6 to see what's out there.

Commissioner Dumas suggested asking new businesses that are wanting to come to downtown to put a bike rack outside their business.

Brian Richards, Planning Director, said we always encourage new businesses to put them in. They are not a requirement, but we always encourage them to do that.

Mr. Roberts and Ms. Huffman reviewed the 5-year forecast. *Refer to Spreadsheet attached hereto as Exhibit No. 2.*

Mayor Clark said can you remind us why in fiscal year 24 the tax rate was set at 17 cents and you had proposed it at 19 cents knowing we were going to build a town hall, have firefighters and bonds.

Mr. Roberts said we had proposed a 19 cent tax rate. The board chose to go with the 17.6 cents knowing obviously they put us down the path which started spending funds on town hall, started moving in the direction of converting the fire department over and those costs were coming. It wouldn't have been as much of an impact on citizens if we had stuck at 19 cents instead of 17.6 cents.

Ms. Huffman encouraged Board members to come meet with her to discuss budget in detail.

There being no further business, the special meeting was adjourned.

Approved this the 3rd day of June, 2024.