

# Greensboro Selectboard

April 25, 2024 – Minutes

[This was a hybrid meeting held at the Greensboro Free Library, with some participants joining remotely]

**SELECTBOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Ellen Celnik, David Kelley, Peter Romans, Eric Hanson, MacNeil

**SELECTBOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:** None

**OTHERS PRESENT in person:** Meaghan Meachem, Beth Meachem, Erika Karp, Stew Arnold, Becky Arnold, Shelly Jungwirth, Chris Cogswell, Paula Harmon, Devin Burgess, Chris Steel, Carolyn Kehler, BJ Gray, Fan Watkinson, Jan Terwiesch, Skip Hoblin, Rick Ely, Linda Ely, Naomi Ranz-Schleifer, Jennifer Ranz, Brett Stanciu, Kim Greaves, Josh Karp, Andy Kehler, Jig Gresser, Alice Perron

**OTHERS PRESENT remote:** Audra Pitts, Chief Dave Brochu, Jr., Davis Barnett, Diana Cazaudumec, Elissa Mackin, Jerilyn Virden, John Mackin, Lindsay Beer, Lisa Yokana, Mimi Benedict, Nancy Hill, Xin Yang, Valerie Carter, Elizabeth Sartorius, Rick Lovett, Nancy Keyes, Nancy Hill, Melissa Moffat, Liz Steel, Lise Armstrong, Lindsay Beer, Jane Hoffman, Janet Long, Glenn Olds, Day Patterson, Bobbie Nisbet, Anthony Acheson, Cynthia West, Aileen Gebbie, Jennifer Lucas, Kristen Leahy, Liz Baum, DeDe Stabler, Linda Ramsdell, Katherine Simpson, Nancy Riege, John Martin, Rod Kerr, Elaine Cole-Kerr, Anne Stevens, Christine Armstrong

**CALLED TO ORDER: 6:30 PM**

## **ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA**

1. Appoint Liz Baum to rec. committee
2. Swim program
3. VTI grant application for Grange
4. FEMA update - Josh
5. Office duties agenda item - tabled to May 22
6. Executive Session – real estate (renewal of option agreement with RuralEdge)
7. Executive Session – legal

## **MINUTES**

4/10/24 minutes unanimously approved.

- Selectboard meetings will be held the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesdays of each month.
- Eric noted minutes need to be released to the public within five business days of the meeting. He suggested that Kim take over doing the agendas, to give Josh more time for minutes and FEMA work. Josh and Kim agreed this was a good plan.

## **PUBLIC CONCERNS**

Devin Burgess said he signed the petition at the 4/24 housing meeting believing it was asking to simply slow down the process. He learned later that the petition took a stand against the project. Devin wanted to say that he supports the project and didn't mean to vote against it.

## **GREENSBORO FIRE DEPT. – Chief Dave Brochu, Jr.**

Chief Brochu said the electrical upgrades to the firehouse, approved by the Board last year, have finally been completed. Most alarm issues at the station have been resolved.

The GFD needs to purchase two replacement SCBA units, one in this fiscal year and one in FY25. This amounts to \$8775 in each fiscal year. David made the following motion:

*The Board approves the SCBA expenditures as presented by Chief Dave Brochu.*

MacNeil seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

## **ROADS & DRIVEWAYS**

1. **Road Foreman's report.** Tom was not present but submitted a written roads report.
2. **Reclassifying roads.** Peter said the town is considering downgrading Barton Drive and White Rd. to Class 4. A public hearing was held at the two roads and the affected landowners were notified. Peter said prior to the Board vote he needs to clarify how this downgrading might affect FEMA reimbursements.
3. **VTrans - Grants in Aid.** Peter made the following motion:  
*The Board will sign the VTrans Grants in Aid application.*  
Ellen seconded the motion which carried unanimously.
4. **FEMA update.** Josh said the process is moving along well and expects the town will be receiving about \$150k in the next few weeks.

## **RURALEdge HOUSING PROPOSAL FOR TOWN HALL – Recap of 4/24 public meeting; Discussion of renewal of option agreement; Discussion about the Village Trust Initiative**

Ellen Celnik: I was concerned that there was a petition against the project before the RuralEdge presentation even happened.

Stew Arnold: The presentation moved the needle for me from neutral to more positive. But I can understand why some are against the project, due to scale. I also want to know how they are actually going to solve the water, septic, parking issues.

David Kelley: The Board won't come close to signing a Purchase and Sales agreement (P&S) until we understand these things. We assume 5% of registered voters will petition for a vote on the P&S.

Skip Hoblin: If they don't get those approvals, they can't move forward with the P&S anyway.

Naomi Ranz-Schliefer: When I hear about a P&S being signed, if all permits and approvals are received, does that mean we can't slow or stop the process? The lack of clarity around the timeline has resulted in a lot of confusion in the community.

David: The Board deciding to renew the option agreement doesn't mean we're also signing a P&S right now.

Ellen: I hope people understand that the planning commission and housing committee have done the background research about RuralEdge – we know they have a great history and reputation. There shouldn't be a question of who we should be working with on this housing project.

David: There are no other organizations with \$10 million who are competing with RuralEdge to do this project.

Jennifer Ranz: Entering into another option agreement makes it impossible to pursue other ideas. Last night there was a lot of misleading information. We have the right to have more conversations and for you to slow down the process. If you sign the option agreement it makes the Village Trust Initiative (VTI) application moot for the town hall because site control is required.

Eric Hanson: We will talk to our lawyer about the site control issue before making a decision. Let's move on to the VTI discussion.

Ellen: The VTI is a great idea, it could be about the library, grange, or any other town building. I agree with slowing down the process.

Naomi: The VTI pre-application is due May 24, it's a three-year program. This could allow our community to retain this town building as a resource, as a community asset. Part of the VTI is about creating a community trust. The reason communities under 2500 are eligible for this program is because small towns need help with the renovation and upkeep of these large, old town buildings.

Ellen: We received an email from a library trustee who is not in favor of the Friends of the Library proposal for the town hall, the trustees weren't unanimous in their support.

Eric: How about we hold another town meeting about the VTI program, and we could discuss town properties.

Meaghen Meachem: The community has now awoken to the conversations that have been happening. The Board is not really listening to the community, its answers are getting defensive and it's kind of disturbing. I think we skipped a few steps, this conversation should have happened a long time ago. The community wants and deserves to have a conversation, the Board needs to hear the other things the community might want to do with the building. There is a conversation going on in the fast lane, and many of us are trying to catch up.

Julie Porrazzo: I agree with Meaghen, I would note that I haven't heard that anyone is against housing in Greensboro, folks just want to have a conversation.

Peter made the following motion:

*Within 30 days, a public meeting will be held on the VTI and uses of town properties.*

Ellen seconded the motion. Further discussion.

MacNeil said big public meetings have a cost, we need to keep that in mind.

Chris Steel: How would this VTI meeting affect the signing of the option agreement?

Rick Ely: I came away from last night feeling that Patrick is close to the end of his rope. Its apparent that he and the staff have worked hard to get where they are. I would encourage the Selectboard, planning commission and housing committee to communicate fully and carefully with him about what kind of delay he is willing to tolerate. It was clear that if RuralEdge is told to go away, it may not come back for a long while. This is something you need to consider carefully.

The vote was held and the motion carried unanimously. The public meeting on the VTI will be held on Thursday May 9.

Eric asked anyone who has ideas for the meeting to send them to Kim and Brett at the town offices.

## **ONGOING BUSINESS**

**1. Wastewater project.** A wastewater committee was formed out of the Greater Greensboro meetings, as many felt that a community wastewater system is crucial infrastructure for both housing and economic development. Eric said the current project has been worked on for about five years, and while engineers have produced a general plan for a community wastewater project in Greensboro, acquiring the land for the disposal field has been problematic.

Ellen said about \$6 million in grant funding has been secured for this project to date.

Eric suggested the town hold a public meeting to discuss this project. The meeting could also serve as a marketing tool to landowners who own parcels the town would like to purchase. Jennifer agreed, and suggested the town should be asking around to see if anyone has land they'd be willing to sell. MacNeil said the town has been in touch with different landowners over the past five years.

Wayne Young asked how much acreage is needed for the disposal field. Peter replied that it's more about the right soil type, and there are very few sites with suitable soils in Greensboro. The engineers looked at soil maps and have pursued sites on the best soils first. Josh asked why lesser-quality sites couldn't be used with added materials such as is done with residential mound systems. Peter said the engineers have

considered this and are still recommending the town focus on acquiring the prime site, off French Hill. The disposal field would be located on land belonging to St. Michael's church and Gerard Fontaine.

Eric said a meeting was held between the parish council and the town's engineering firm, but the wastewater committee hasn't yet followed up. He felt the church congregation needs to get behind the sale. Chris Steel spoke to the Parish Council, and while it appeared they weren't averse to the land sale, they needed more time to understand the project and process. When he spoke with them, it appeared they hadn't been engaged sufficiently to make a proper decision, and without a bishop to approve the sale, they also felt they weren't in a position to make a decision.

Ellen suggested having the meeting in the Bend. Peter wondered if a public meeting is even necessary. Eric made the following motion:

*The town will hold a public meeting on the wastewater project.*

Peter seconded the motion which did not carry (P.R, E.H. in favor, M., E.C., D.K. opposed).

Peter said part of why more progress hasn't been made on the land sales is that the Selectboard is at capacity. To those who say "do more", Peter said sometimes it's just not possible. If you want to make things happen in town, he said, please volunteer. More residents are needed on the wastewater committee. Stew Arnold said he has some experience with wastewater systems, and has helped to organize "septic socials" to educate the lake community on modern system design. Some group systems can serve up to 10 households, he said.

Wastewater committee members are Dan Predpall, Eric, and Peter. Stew said he'd join the committee.

2. **Glover Property.** Peter said the town's gravel pit property in Glover is 75 acres. Part of this parcel is a five-acre field adjacent to Rt. 16, currently in agricultural use. This section will never be used for sand or gravel extraction, and the town has no use for it. A few acres of woods could also be sold with the field. This could be a source of revenue, which the town could use right now.  
Peter said he's talked with Glover Planning Commission member Liz Nelson about this property, to see if the two towns could possibly work together on something.
3. **Wilson St. drainage issues.** No update yet, the town expects to hear about the engineering grant soon.
4. **Village Trust Initiative – application for Grange.** Dave said he'd like to see the VTI application include the Grange. Board members thought this was fine. Naomi said you can only apply for one building at once, and since the initial idea was to apply for the town hall, she suggested she and Dave have a conversation with folks at VTI.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

1. **1% local option tax for rooms and meals.** Peter said many towns do this and it could generate \$10k/year. The state would collect the tax and send a check to the town periodically. Unfortunately, the state keeps 30% of the tax receipts.

Peter said this is considered a progressive tax that would mostly be paid by visitors. It's a consumption tax, and lower income folks typically wouldn't be paying this tax. The amount is so small, it's not going to chase people out of town. Peter added this is not a tax on businesses, it's a tax on consumers.

Brett said this tax makes sense, wouldn't harm Greensboro residents and could help reduce municipal tax increases.

Beth Meachem said many towns earmark option tax receipts for a specific purpose so the money doesn't get lost in the general fund. This could also be a way to sell the tax to voters. Jennifer Lucas suggested the funds be spent on enforcement of rental regulations. She added that the state is considering a 1.5% tax on short term rentals.

Alice Perron said she supports the tax, noting it's very different from taxes imposed on us by the state.

Peter did a straw poll and a majority of those present supported the option tax. Eric made the following motion:

*At some point this summer, a public meeting will be held to discuss the 1% option tax on rooms and meals.*

The motion did not receive a second.

2. **Caspian Arts** submitted a request to use the Grange during the summer and fall as an exhibition space for local artists. Christine Armstrong, a town health officer, noted there can be no use of the sink or toilet. Ellen made the following motion:

*The Board approves Caspian Arts using the Grange building during the summer and fall of 2024.*

Peter seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

3. **Recreation Committee appointment.** Peter made the following motion:

*The Board appoints Liz Baum to the recreation committee.*

Ellen seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

4. **Swim program.** Carolyn Kehler asked the Board to support the idea of adult swimming lessons. The town's teaching partner, Teach America to Swim, has informally agreed to teach adults in the early evening after running the kid lessons. The Board was in support.

Carolyn said the swim program has the funds it needs to operate this season.

## **EXECUTIVE SESSIONS**

Peter made the following motion:

*The Board will enter executive session at 8:20 PM to discuss a legal issue.*

MacNeil seconded the motion which carried unanimously. The Board exited executive session at 8:45 PM and David made the following motion:

*The Board will allocate \$1,000 for one week to settle the Rocco Realty case.*

Peter seconded the motion which carried unanimously. Dave Kelley will communicate this to the town's attorney.

MacNeil made the following motion:

*The Board will enter executive session at 8:50 PM to discuss a real estate purchase option.*

The Board exited executive session at 9:10 PM and Peter made the following motion:

*The Board will extend the option agreement with RuralEdge to 12/31/2024 to allow for the negotiation of a Purchase and Sale agreement that can be presented to the voters.*

Ellen seconded the motion which carried unanimously. Dave Kelley will communicate this to Rural Edge.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 9:15 PM.

*Respectfully Submitted, Josh Karp, Selectboard Clerk*

*AMENDED 5/9/24 J.K.*