

January 31, 2015
Board of Commissioners Retreat Minutes

The Wendell Town Board of Commissioners held a Special Called Meeting on Saturday, January 31, 2015, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. for the purpose of a Board Retreat, with Mayor Timothy Hinnant presiding. Present at the retreat were Commissioner's James Parham; Virginia Gray; Sam Laughery; Jon Lutz; and John Boyette; Manager Teresa Piner; Attorney Jim Cauley; Clerk Jonnie Driver; Public Works Director Alton Bryant; Planning Director David Bergmark; Finance Director Butch Kay; IT Administrator Tamah Hughes; Parks and Recreation Director Jeff Polaski; and Police Chief Bill Carter; East Wake News Editor Johnny Whitfield and Lydian Altman, School of Government Facilitator of the meeting.

Mayor Hinnant called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Ms. Altman said she had a list of four items to be accomplished today were:

- What changes do you anticipate in the next 15 years that will impact the community and the town?
- What does the future look like?
- How should we go about deciding what priorities the town will focus on in the next 18 months to three years?
- What needs to be done to get the town towards the vision you've developed?

Ms. Altman asked if this was generally the objectives the board would like to address. Everyone was in agreement.

Ms. Altman said she had several guidelines for a productive meeting:

- Collaboration
- Balancing advocacy and inquiry
- Focus on interest not positions
- Checking on the assumptions

Everyone was asked to introduce themselves and tell one thing that has happened in the last year or so that made them extremely proud. The things that were mentioned were staff competency, consistency of services by staff; problem-solving abilities and attitudes; business-like approach; investment in professional development; positive movement towards the future; housing starts, Town Hall renovations; Manager's guidance, support of and challenge to employees; vibrancy within the town with all the events that have been scheduled; equipment acquisitions; financial strength and solvency of the town; Board's patience; Town investments like the Welcome to Wendell sign and the electronic message board; intent to develop town as destination; and collective unity to get the work done.

Ms. Altman asked the group to think about things you think would happen in the short-term, medium-term, or long-term, and what would have to occur to accomplish those changes. Each commissioner and staff listed the changes they thought would happen, posted them on the wall in short term, mid-term, and long term.

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Items included transportation, the way the town does business, planning changes, Wi-Fi and fiber installation, PARTF Grants/park plan, complete improvements to town hall, new town hall, strengthen relationships with developers, more programs for seniors, special needs, staff additions, continue to pursue medical facilities, installing more neighborhood, changes in focus of state legislation and impact on the town, housing in Wendell proper, financial challenges with growth, ongoing water and sewer infrastructure, incorporating Wendell Falls into Wendell, Support School System to promote economic growth.

Mrs. Altman said there were several notes about a new town hall. Where does this project stand?

Mayor Hinnant said it is just in our heads, not even on paper.

There was also a wish list (items that would not necessarily impact the town, but were improvements to the delivery of services.

- Fix Parks and Recreation entrance inside the community center to increase security of staff, funnel people into certain areas
- Offer more varied parks and recreation programs, e.g., seniors, preschool and after school
- Review of equipment: do we have the automation we need? Is equipment up to date? Safe? Adequate?
- Adequate park bathroom facilities to meet demands of hosting tournaments
- Transportation Plan in place

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Mayor Hinnant stated he realized the magnitude of needs within the town he realized how much the town needed to look into a bond issue. He said there was no way we could tax ourselves out of these problems. It was not something that a one or two cent tax increase would fix. We were talking about much bigger issues which need to be addressed.

Mrs. Altman asked if there were other things that anyone thought needed to be added to the list.

David Bergmark said we talked about Wendell Falls and the demographics. He was not just speaking about a number increase, but also the demographics of those moving to Wendell and the life style they would be looking for.

Mayor Hinnant said in talking about Wendell Falls and the demographics it made he think about how we want to structure this board in the future, because he knew with a large development , representation could come from one side of town and Wendell proper could have no representation. We need to think about going to districts, because he did not want to be sitting at his home and not having any representation on the board.

Commissioner Parham said if we want to be competitive we have to find a way to fund our needs in order to be competitive.

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Commissioner Gray said improvements to Town Hall, and getting the PARTF Grant will get us to the break even point as far as competitiveness with our neighbors. She said we are a bit behind.

Mrs. Altman said this was where she wanted the board to be, thinking about needed changes.

Mrs. Altman said the next exercise was what does the future look like?

Everyone was paired and conducted interviews with one another, then there was discussion among groups and the values were identified as:

- Small Town Charm
- Family Oriented
- Quality of family life and community
- Safe environment
- Friendly, positive attitudes
- Active citizens, active recreation
- An Active and Vibrant Downtown
- Customer Orientation

Each group was then asked to give their Vision of the Future and give the actions for getting that vision:

- Curb appeal, tree lined streets, sidewalks
- Active and engaged Downtown
- Population
- Town staff

Actions, Decisions, Practices (that enable vision)

- Proper Envision of growth such as adequate sidewalks, bike paths, data, transit, and traffic and doing it before the need.
- Sticking to the plan, once you have a plan in place that will get you to your goal stick with it.
- Facility needs assessment for town
- Inventory of land and businesses
- Formal study to project needed numbers and skills of employees
- Areas of growth; how to guide

Commissioner Laughery said one thing that he and the manager had discussed was whether Wendell Falls would use the Town's sign design, and if not could the Town use their design. He would like for everyone to think about this. We could use their design and have one overall look in town.

Commissioner Gray said we need to be very careful, we do not need to change everything to match Wendell Falls, we need to keep our design for Wendell.

Lunch Break 12:00 – 1:00 p.m.

Ms. Altman asked what impressions the board had about the discussions so far. Commissioner Laughery said he thought it showed that we were all on the same page. All were in agreement. Ms. Altman said did you hear any comments that surprised you. Mayor Hinnant said it made him understand more

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about the needs of the Town long term and that we were going to have to address them immediately and that we were not anywhere close to being ready.

Ms. Altman stated that it appeared that the actions, decisions, and practices we received were:

Focus on Downtown

- Maintain façade program/grant
- Support Chamber's work to promote downtown revitalization
- Emphasize recreational opportunities and downtown improvements
- Integrate unique activities at events

Invest in infrastructure

- Roads, technology, water, sewer, transit, parks and recreation, data to make development easier
- Acquire land for town

Ms. Altman said we listed land acquisition as a need and it did not tell me a lot, would that be part of the infrastructure. Mrs. Piner said the land for this building that we are in today was purchased about 30 years before the community center was built, so it would seem that we need to start searching for land to site a new town hall. Teresa said had asked the department heads to begin looking ahead as to personnel that would be needed. The first step would be to compare other towns and obtain estimates on what our needs might be.

Aggressively explore funding options and opportunities to get this work done.

Hire well-qualified employees who can hit the ground running.

Teresa said we are very fortunate to have the colleges we have in this area. She said in the past she had been able to new planning department employees out of college and train them. However, she did not think we were going to be able to do that now, we were going to have to spend more money in getting people that were qualified.

Ms. Altman said she thought this was more of a plan. It is almost a principle so it would be placed under principles.

Ms. Altman said there were three notes that had to do with funding and they were proper envisioning of growth and finances. Commissioner Boyette said he thought it was taking a look at where your growth was going. We have looked at our downtown and most towns don't have just one retail district and one industrial district. He said how to best guide growth in areas so that if we get another grocery store, that we can direct to the other side of town instead of having two together. Ms. Altman asked how the direction of guiding was usually done. Commissioner Boyette said after the fact. Commissioner Laughery said by our master plan. Commissioner Parham said you have to anticipate the growth, not wait until it is here. Commissioner Gray said she thought we had an advantage in seeing other towns grow and we had been a little slower, so that could work to our advantage. Commissioner Laughery said businesses were going to come if they thought they would make money. He said that was not something that we could control. We have a tax break program, but we can't force a business to move here. Commissioner Boyette said if the town knows those businesses are going to come, are we prepared to say no. What would we do to convince them to go to the other side of town? He did not

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think we could control that, but how are we going to direct the growth where we want it to go. Mayor Hinnant said you do that with our UDO, PUD document and tools that we have in place. He said he would tell you that we would not say no to any business that wants to come to Wendell if it is across the street from another business or not. Commissioner Laughery said we need to get some of the owner's downtown to make improvements to their buildings that would bring businesses to town. Mayor Hinnant said he thought the Chamber had to drive the business owner's downtown to do a better job of keeping their building fixed up. Commissioner Parham said he did not think we had gotten the business owners together and explained to them the incentives that were available and the results that could come out of this. Commissioner Gray said she thought that was the job of the Economic Development Committee; they have Chamber representation on that committee. She said maybe we could get some of them that had success in remodeling their buildings to come and talk with the group. Commissioner Lutz said he thought we were doing a good job of getting activities downtown.

Mayor Hinnant said the Planning Department cannot do all of this work because Wendell Falls was gearing up and they were going to be busy with all the work there. We have done about all we can do.

Commissioner Laughery said we were missing one big part of the picture and that was the Transportation Plan. If we were to receive funding today from DOT we have no priorities in place. He said CAMPO was in the process of updating the Transportation Plan and we have nothing in the plan for CAMPO. He said the Transportation Plan was cut out of the budget last year and it was important to have something in place.

Mayor Hinnant said you can come up with all the plans you want, but when you tell the public that you would be taking some of their land, that was another whole issue. He had been in this courtroom twice when a transportation plan was submitted and it was a very hostile environment, because people do not want you taking their land.

Commissioner Boyette said it sounded as if the problem was the way we were presenting it to the public as we would an actual plan. Commissioner Gray said it was a touchy situation, but she thought now was the best time for something like this, because of the traffic issues that we are already facing.

Commissioner Laughery said except for the people that would be directly affected on Wall Street, he did not believe that we would have any problem with fixing Buffalo Street. Commissioner Gray agreed. Commissioner Boyette said he thought it would depend on what you call fixing. Commissioner Laughery said he thought we needed to come up with one or two areas that we would like to see fixed.

What are the words that need to come out of this discussion that would make an action item out of this? David said he thought it was important to make a distinction between a couple of improvements and a Transportation Plan. Commissioner Laughery said and David needs to submit this to CAMPO.

Commissioner Gray said the Transportation Plan is separate from the 2 individual plans, but they were intertwined.

Commissioner Boyette said the individual list or the Transportation Plan, was this something we could do ourselves or are we going to have to have a consultant. Teresa said we would need engineering assistance. She said she understood the cost to be \$35,000, but we could lose a lot more than that if we don't have a plan in place that tells a developer what was expected when they come into town.

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Mayor Hinnant said his only concern was taking \$35,000 now and we had a grocery list of things that we need. He said he would rather wait until the town gets a little more money, because it was hard to explain to citizens why we spent \$35,000 and kids were standing in line to use the rest room at the park events.

Commissioner Boyette said we were going to always have immediate needs but part of our job was long term planning and if we don't use long term things we make it worse for ourselves.

Commissioner Gray said Wendell Falls was up on the board 15 times, and that was why we need the transportation plan, because growth was going to happen there and if we don't have the transportation plan in place we can't make that grow to the optimum of the town.

Ms. Altman said we need to talk about the funding.

Mayor Hinnant said we know we have a funding need and we have some fund balance, but we operate in the red by using the fund balance. He said the need to increase staff, bathrooms and other issues that have been talked about. How are we going to fund these needs?

Commissioner Parham said he thought we needed to decide on our priorities and what kind of loan or bond we would need. We need to prioritize the list and decide what money we need. Commissioner Parham said if we had a close estimate of the cost, we had a financial expert our Finance Director and he believed we could make a decision and move forward.

Ms. Altman called for a 15 minute break at 2:15 p.m.

Ms. Altman said Teresa, Butch and myself tried to pull out the most talked about things today and recognizing that how you finance something depends on what it is. We made a list and you get four dots to vote with and we have staff and council at the table and we had not talked about whether staff would take part in voting. Mayor Hinnant said I don't think staff should vote, because I feel like staff has tried to drive the board in the past year and we need to drive staff. Everyone agreed. Teresa said I feel this is the boards retreat and it help staff to know what the boards priorities are. Ms. Altman said the list we put up consist of the following:

- Develop over all Transportation Plan
- Fund Broadband
- Fund Wi-Fi downtown
- Complete Raleigh Water and Sewer Merger so that you have uniform rates. Teresa said on the list, water and sewer infrastructure was noted.
- Land acquisitions for Town Hall/Police Department and additional fields in the park
- Undertake projected employee needs assessment
- Downtown (1) Invest in events (2) Undertake streetscapes (3) Publicize incentives for downtown
- Provide bathroom facilities at the Wendell Park

The commissioners placed dots on the items they felt were most important on the list. Ms. Altman said the bathrooms and Transportation Plan received the top votes, then Downtown events, and Broadband, and Wi-Fi.

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Mayor Hinnant said the only thing he thought we were not looking at was land acquisitions for Town Hall. We should decide where Town Hall would be and when we need to start. Mayor Hinnant said the renovations that we had underway at Town Hall would not hold us for 10 years. Ms. Altman said what was the next specific process do you need to do. Commissioner Gray said we had not even decided on where the building should go. Commissioner Laughery said Commissioner Boyette and I were going to sit down and take a look at where they office should be, how much space are we going to need, what amount of money we will need, and brings these things back to the board for discussion.

Mayor Hinnant said that was fine, but this was not a plan, the board had not sanctioned them to take charge of this, so it does not mean that what they come up with would be approved. Commissioner Laughery said they were aware and that they we would gather the information and bring back to the board for discussion the last of March or the first of April. Commissioner Gray said she thought staff needed to share the information they had gathered with the board and we move from there. Ms. Altman asked when could funding options be explored for Town Hall.

David said we do not currently have impact fees, but that would be another funding option. Mayor Hinnant said now would be the time to explore that and he would be glad to carry this to the legislature. Mayor Hinnant said Darren Jackson sent me a note this week and asked if there was anything that he could do for us, so this might be an opportunity to get some support. Mayor Hinnant said we need to talk about this at the next meeting when the attorney was here. Commissioner Laughery said he knew nothing about bonds but was there some way that we could get someone to come in and speak to us concerning bonds.

Butch said we might be able to pay cash for the Transportation Plan. As far as some of the things we will need to put in the budget for next year, a loan may be needed. Ms. Altman said this was a big commitment and what you learn about bonds and loans may move some of the items up on the list.

Ms. Altman said let's take a 5 minute break.

Ms. Altman said you started out today by talking about the things you were happy about and you had set yourself some work agenda's as well as thinking about things you said you wanted people to say about how the town does business. She said you hear citizens talking about Wendell and what do you want them to say. Commissioner Gray said she would want them to say they appreciate what she does for the town, that I always attend meetings, come prepared and that she was fair. She said she thought people enjoyed talking about the negative things and never say anything about the good we accomplish. Commissioner Laughery said in fairness they are critical about everything. Commissioner Lutz said as a board he would like for them to say that the board was efficient in how it takes care of business. Commissioner Boyette said he had heard those same people say that we were working better together as a board. Commissioner Gray said she would like for them to give us the benefit of the doubt and say that the board had a hard decision to make and we appreciate that. Commissioner Boyette said he wanted them to be surprised and not surprised. Not be surprised that we make the right decisions and he wanted them to be surprised at some of the ideas we have. He said he did not want to continue to do the same things we had done in the past.

Commissioner Parham said if he heard negative comments, he would share them with the board and see if we could work on those things.

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Ms. Altman asked was there anything that needed to be adjusted to get the results you want. Commissioner Parham said share things with each other and have respect for each other. Commissioner Gray said she wished we had more avenues of communication between staff and the board. Commissioner Parham said the commissioners could make a point to visit businesses every week and if they had something on their mind, they would be sure to let you know. Mayor Hinnant said to legally to have communication with the department heads was to have committee's with one on each committee. Teresa said this was something we had in the past, however due to having so many other meetings that created another meeting and time constraints. The mayor said sometimes he wondered if that impedes on the manager's duties and responsibilities that was a fine line. Commissioner Gray said we do need to do more to communicate with the public. She said we were doing better. Teresa said we have updated the website, send out the e-blasts, newly installed the message board, utilize EWTN and the Eastern Wake News, and are on Facebook and twitter. Commissioner Gray said we do a lot, but it was never enough according to the public. Ms. Altman said we need to always use the old options, like the radio and television because some people do not use social media.

Ms. Altman said she was talking to someone at break about the pattern you do for board retreats and she would like some feedback from today. What did you like, what you would expect from the board retreat. Commissioner Gray said she liked the fact that staff was involved, we got their perspective and that we had a facilitator, it keeps us on track. Jeff said when he thought of a retreat he would like to have it somewhere else, somewhere where we do not work on a daily basis.

Ms. Altman said she believed we had gotten through most of the objectives and that was her goal for today. She would like one work from each of you that would sum up what you felt. The words were motivated, unity, clarity, centered, positive, productive, optimistic, exciting, direction, relieved.

Mayor Hinnant adjourned the meeting at 4:00 p.m.

Timothy A. Hinnant, Mayor

Attest:

Jonnie S. Driver, Town Clerk