



Morrisville Town Council

Work Session

October 21, 2008

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Faulkner called the meeting of the Town Council to order at 6:30 p.m. Also present for the meeting were Mayor Pro-Tem Johnson and Council Members Murry, Lyons, Stohlman, Martin and Snyder. Town Attorney Frank Gray arrived at 6:48 pm. Present staff included John Whitson/Town Manager, Diana Davis/Town Clerk, Stacie Galloway/Public Information Officer, Tony Chiotakis/Senior Director of Community Services, Todd Wright/Fire Chief, Ben Hitchings/Planning Director, Michele Hane/Transportation Planner, Jerry Allen/Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Director, Julia Ketchum/Senior Director of Business Management and Jeanne Hooks/Budget Officer.

CONSIDER CRABTREE CROSSING NOT BEING IN THE LRFP

Council Member Lyons stated that she brought the item of discussion forward to remove Crabtree Crossing from the plan forward. Things have changed since the bond was issued. There was some uncertainty as to what the bond was for. How the citizens in that area feel about this project was known and it was an expensive project.

Mayor Faulkner asked about discussion at the Planning and Zoning Board level for the Land Use and Transportation Plan Update.

John Whitson, Town Manager stated that they would probably take action next month.

Council Member Stohlman stated that it was a bit out of order and the Planning and Zoning Board should make a recommendation first before this was considered.

Council Member Lyons stated that she just wanted to discuss the removal of the item, but it was not being voted on.

Council Member Stohlman stated that if it did not make it through the process this may not even need to be discussed.

Council Member Martin stated that it was an issue because as long as it stayed on the Long Range Financial Plan (LRFP) it was being discussed over and over. The train station was planning to go over Crabtree Crossing during the initial consideration and a lot has changed since then.

Council Member Murry stated that fiscally he would agree with removing this from the LRFP. There was a discussion previously about the Council having discussions regarding items that the Planning and Zoning Board was considering. This point was brought up with Park West as well.

Council Member Snyder concurred.

Mayor Pro-Tem Johnson stated that this could be a moot point and it should be considered by the Planning and Zoning Board first.

Council Member Lyons stated that if the Council did not want it on this agenda, there should have been an email stating as such prior to this meeting.

Council Member Snyder stated that he wanted to hear why it should be discussed. Park West also had bearing on the LRFP because of taxes that would affect that project.

Council Member Lyons stated that the Planning and Zoning Board was supposed to have already voted on this item, but they tabled it for further discussion.

Council Member Murry stated that there may not be a cross-over if this was discussed in context with the LRFP.

Mr. Whitson stated that as the LRFP was briefed, the projects would be brought over into individual project pages with projected funding for the Council to consider. The projects were interconnected and the projects were changed every year.

Council Member Murry stated that Council Member Martin brought up providing disclosures for folks that may be affected by potentially constructing Crabtree Crossing.

Council Member Martin stated that there were plans, but the project was unfunded. Other projects should be considered.

Mayor Faulkner stated that the initial process should continue. The Planning and Zoning Board may change the priorities or the Council may reprioritize.

Council Member Stohlman stated that what Council Member Martin stated had some validity. When researching a property, this could affect purchasers and could be considered a negative impact. They also probably conduct due diligence.

Council Member Murry stated that some of projected projects and transportation could affect this project anyway.

Mayor Faulkner asked when the Council would be presented with this.

Mr. Whitson stated that the Planning and Zoning Board recommendation for the LUTP would be completed shortly. The Council, under the current schedule would be briefed in December and January. The first view of the LRFP would be Dec 2nd. The public hearing for the LUTP would probably be the business session in November. There would be public input on the December 2nd meeting for the LRFP. There would be a briefing on December 9th, retreat and another briefing in January with potential adoption at the business session in January.

Mayor Faulkner stated that folks should sign up for the broadcast database to know when to be present to give feedback.

Mr. Whitson stated that there were several databases that could be used for this public notification: "Next Week in Morrisville, a Budget Broadcast and a Citizens Interested in Transportation Issue".

NEWSLETTER ARTICLES

Council Member Murry stated that when there were topics to be known about, most of them know because they read it in the Newsletter. The concern was with the current vendors. With the stable addresses there were vendors that could get this out quicker. The goal was for timely delivery of information.

Council Member Snyder stated that one option would be to give folks the option to get an electronic newsletter versus a paper copy.

Mayor Pro-Tem Johnson stated that it may create an issue if folks were signed up for an electronic copy, moved without notifying the town, and the new owner then received no newsletter, electronic or hardcopy.

Council Member Snyder stated that it was folks' responsibility to report that.

Stacie Galloway, PIO gave a [presentation](#).

Council Member Snyder stated that there was one way to know that folks moved in or out and it was through utility billing.

Council Member Murry stated that there could be an updated database each month.

Ms. Galloway asked if the suggestion was to search for a new vendor.

Council Member Murry stated that the Raleigh News and Observer could be used. The lead time was the issue. There were vendors that could provide that. First class mail was expensive, but it was reliable.

Council Member Martin asked if there was a way that an area of the newspaper could be reserved.

Mr. Whitson stated that the town could pay to reserve a page.

Council Member Snyder asked about the difference in the time frame for bulk mail and first class mail.

Ms. Galloway stated that it was usually two or three extra days' difference, which was probably not worth \$1000 extra each month.

Mr. Whitson stated that the town gets the best possible rate because they use a certified sorter, which reduced the postal rate.

Ms. Galloway stated that TCG, the current vendor, was very reliable and no one else could do it for the price they did. This was the one thing that residents get for certain and it should not be compromised.

Council Member Lyons asked if there was a way folks could be polled to see if they want or don't want the Connection.

Ms. Galloway stated that they could be asked, but it would create the same issue as an electronic newsletter if residents moved and the Connection was not being delivered to that address.

Mr. Whitson stated that with some apartment complexes there was the chance to put these newsletters in an area for pick-up if folks wanted them.

Ms. Galloway stated that it was good to have the technology available to get information out to folks in other ways as well.

Council Member Murry asked if it usually got delivered by the first of the month.

Ms. Galloway stated that was usually how it occurred. If there was something that should be waited on, then things that may happen early in the month could be left out of the Connection.

Council Member Murry asked why it took two days to drop content into the layout if a proof was changed.

Ms. Galloway stated that the vendor did a wonderful job proofreading and this was an important step.

Council Member Murry stated that it should be delivered to the vendor perfect and then delivered to the post office immediately.

Council Member Snyder stated that the hard copy going to residents needed to be reviewed by staff before it went out.

Ms. Galloway stated that the company physically brings the newsletter by and it gets proofed and signed on the spot.

Mayor Faulkner asked if this was something that was not broken that the Council was discussing fixing.

Ms. Galloway stated that there were two items that were past the normal date during the time this vendor has been handling the Connection.

Council Member Murry stated that he was trying to provide some flexibility for the Council to get material in the newsletter during the business meeting.

Ms. Galloway asked if it should be sent out at the end of the month.

Mayor Pro-Tem Johnson asked if there was a reason it was sent out mid-month.

Ms. Galloway stated that the monthly newsletters covered two months at a time, with some overlap for the calendar on the back. It seemed to create confusion if the newsletter was sent past the first with that month listed on the heading.

Council Member Stohlman asked if first class mail could be used on an as needed basis.

Ms. Galloway stated that was possible.

Council Member Snyder asked about a set day of the month, such as a third Wednesday so the Council knows when it was going out.

Council Member Murry stated it may be good to have a subject lined up for each month of the year ahead of time.

Ms. Galloway stated that there could be a plan, but there needed to be the ability to react with news as well.

Council Member Murry stated that the budget issues could be addressed every year on April regardless of what was going on. This way, important issues would not slip through because of something else going on.

Mr. Chiotakis stated that it appeared that the Connection was trying to be used for a different purpose than it was intended for. A newsletter did not serve to get late breaking news out to the public. The quality and information expectations of the newsletter may be detracted from. The town listens and reacts to citizens. He suggested that we put effort into finding a better way to meet the goal of getting info out after the second meeting, if that was the goal. The budget calendar was adopted, so this could be forecasted and addressed in the Connection. Other items could also follow this standard. Getting this information to them in a timely and correct manner was important.

Council Member Murry stated that most meetings were prior to the 28th. If the proof time and lead time was shortened by about five business dates, that would move the date to after the business meeting. However, staff should not be pushed past their comfort zone.

Mr. Whitson stated that to remove part of the process runs the risk of not seeing what goes to the public.

Ms. Galloway stated that she would work with TCG to see if hours or days could be shaved off of the time.

Council Member Murry stated that getting it out early would change the perception of the newsletters monthly coverage.

Council Member Snyder stated that folks were usually looking at the current month, so maybe it could be moved back to the 16th.

Council Member Murry stated that may help. If it was shortened that would be helpful. The Council needed to know the regular deadline for the Connection.

Ms. Galloway stated that she did not frequently get items from the Council to put in the Connection and the deadline could be adjusted.

Council Member Snyder stated that the goal was to get information out in the most timely, effective manner.

Mayor Pro-tem Johnson stated that she was not sure that this was an issue.

Ms. Galloway stated that she was trying to get information out in other ways as well. However, the Connection was the only guarantee. There were residents that did not use the internet, so staff could not count on the electronic means alone. She was going to try to stay in tune with what the Council thought was important issues for the newsletter. The vendor would be talked with as well to try to shorten the time frame and first class mail could be considered on an occasional basis.

Council Member Snyder asked for an update in a couple of months on how it was proceeding.

BUDGET PROCESS AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Council Member Stohlman gave a [presentation](#) regarding a Budget Panel and staff budget reports. There had been work on a summary of all reports received from the budget staff. Staff was developing a summary report as well. This information was just his opinion on matters.

Mayor Faulkner asked for additional information from staff.

Mr. Whitson stated that the Administration, Human Resources and Governing Body had a spreadsheet that included expenditures for every expense, the expenditures for current and prior years and provided a graph of the actual, projected and budgeted funds. This could be done for every department if Council was comfortable with that.

Council Member Stohlman stated it was good to have the comparison ability and to have detailed information for review, but the hope and goal was that folks could see the big picture and the overall affect and not get hung up on little details.

Mr. Whitson stated that prior to four months ago there was never a situation where citizens wanted to see individual line items. A plan was implemented to work on the situation that occurred last year.

Council Member Stohlman stated that a Budget Panel provided a way to provide independent verification of funds and line items.

Mr. Whitson stated that the public wanted to see the town being good stewards of the funds. The auditors review the budget and give a detailed analysis.

Council Member Stohlman stated this should be tried. It was worth an attempt and if no one wanted to get involved than it would not move forward.

Council Member Lyons asked how the panel would be chosen.

Mr. Whitson stated that research by staff was done nationally and locally. One issue was that there would be double work unless the Committee or Panel was trusted to do the work for the Council. Staff was prepared to brainstorm the issues that the Council wanted to resolve.

Council Member Stohlman stated that the problem was what occurred during the last budget adoption. Giving lots of chances for public input would reduce the option of last minute large amounts of negative input.

Mr. Whitson stated that this set of circumstances would occur not more than once every eight years and maybe less. There was a reduction in economics and a revaluation that occurred at the same time as the budget was being considered.

Council Member Lyons concurred with Council Member Stohlman and stated the public should feel comfortable.

Council Member Murry stated that the goal was to have a strong public identity and that would be addressed by a Committee or Panel. The Budget Manager added several chances for public input. Before new positions were added, department heads should justify that to the Committee. There were eight additional items sent to the Council in April that could also be considered by that group. The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) process could be discussed as well as which should be required to be considered by voter approved bonds. Either there was going to be operational or personnel cuts or the debt/taxes would have to be raised.

Mayor Pro-Tem Johnson stated that the budget analysis could be covered quarterly. To get ahead of an issue was important. There was a concern with who may get involved in a panel and how to provide a chance for every person that wanted to get involved to be able to do so. This information would of course be shared with any interested party. If no one showed up, then the right procedure was obviously not found and another process could be considered.

Mayor Faulkner asked if a panel was needed or just a quarterly update prior to a business meeting to present to the public and advertise it as such. Or was there a benefit of a smaller group in addition to that.

Council Member Stohlman stated that there was a certain amount of distrust in the staff by certain members of the public. If all the parties got together as information evolved, that would be helpful.

Council Member Lyons stated that members of the staff had stepped up during the last budget to let the public know where cuts were made.

Council Member Stohlman stated that it was good to say hello to your enemies, welcome them into the house with a hot meal and there would be a better buy-in if folks accepted the fact that there were different views in the town, embrace it and make them part of the process, because they already were a part of the process.

Council Member Martin stated that if folks could follow the process and stay updated there would not be a problem.

Mayor Pro-Tem Johnson stated that the panel would not be to pull apart the budget, but to make the information available to the public in a clear vocabulary and to explain what was happening and why.

Council Member Stohlman stated that then variances could be explained and understood by all.

Council Member Lyons stated that there were not enemies, there were concerned citizens. *Council Member Stohlman* stated that he did not mean that the way that it may have been interpreted. What was trying to be stated was that different opinions needed to be embraced.

Julia Ketchum, Senior Director of Business Management stated that the calendar just adopted came about because of things that were heard by the public that needed to be addressed. Staff was following a resolution to have the Long Range Financial Plan (LRFP) ready by January 31st of each year. Folks stated that they did not know these things. However, this was agreed upon two years prior. So this may need to be changed. It was confusing sometimes to understand what was needed. The budget report was revised three different times and there was not a consensus of what the Council wanted to see and this information needed to be received to help guide staff. Until staff was clear then that perception was not going to be change.

Council Member Snyder stated that the resolution was adopted as recommended by staff, so maybe staff needed to propose something different based on the previous affects on the budget.

Mr. Whitson stated that a preliminary LRFP should be adopted in February and then a final adoption could be adopted with the budget. This would help the LRFP remain somewhat fluid and still provide a framework for the staff to work with.

Council Consensus was in agreement.

Council Member Martin asked about approving the budget before the LRFP.

Mr. Whitson stated that the LRFP provided a way to see the long term affects of decisions.

Council Member Snyder stated that it was a tool to help decide the budget.

Council Member Stohlman stated that he liked the thought of the preliminary and then final adoption of the LRFP. It was uncomfortable to change the LRFP at the last minute.

Ms. Ketchum stated that staff wanted to mend broken bridges in the community and they wanted to support the Council and the Council's support was needed in return.

Council Member Stohlman stated that staff was very responsive.

Mr. Ketchum stated that staff wanted to come up with a report to provide to the Council, which was their job. That way the Council did not have to sit at home and create spreadsheets.

Tony Chiotakis, Senior Director of Community Services stated that in getting information to the public there were some avenues for that. If the finance staff could create a report acceptable to the Council, there were ways to get that distributed to the public on a regular basis. The goal there would be to provide the information the Council wanted. Regarding the LRFP, the question was whether the LRFP provided a good tool for planning. It was the backbone for forecasting for the budget. The history was pretty accurate and it was gaining additional data input each year. The calendar and discussion schedule could be discussed. Two or three components of the LRFP could be discussed individually such as personnel or CIP.

Mr. Whitson stated that staff was challenged daily on resources and allocation of staff. The money was not spent without consideration. Cuts in the budget were constantly monitored to insure funds were not wasted. There was nothing unessential to cut from the budget. Surgical changes to the budget would be preferred over just completely removing things. For example, the early retirement item. To have the question asked if there was any other staff to cut was demoralizing to staff. Staff only asks for positions that were necessary. Cuts were trying to be made and processes constantly reviewed. The situation where that one position could be removed for a period of time at a minimal cost compared to savings was relevant to bring forward to the Council for consideration. There were other similar items that would come forward for the Council to consider. The bottom line was that there were excellent services being provided to citizens at a lower price in a competitive manner with other local municipalities. The price of government was important. With the income census information, quality services here were a bargain. The services should be created based on what funding was available to continue to provide such services. Staff was always proud of the work they do and they always worked hard to provide for the citizens of Morrisville and wanted the Council to be proud as well. Morrisville was putting out more public information than any other municipality. They worked very hard to do this for the citizens and did not mind doing so. The point was that very rarely did staff hear from the Council in front of the public that staff was doing a good job.

Council Member Stohlman stated that this was a process that everyone could benefit from that would not take a large amount of time or effort. No one from staff was meant to be singled out.

Mr. Whitson stated that no individual staff member had been singled out, but it would be beneficial for the Council to defend staff as a group when folks gave input at the microphone. For example, when Mr. Schlink blasts the staff the Council never defends staff in any way. This was difficult for staff because staff members would be out of place to counter. Staff did not hear the Council doing this with the public in general. They may do this individually, but it was not seen. When staff was individually appreciated by the Council for work on a particular issue or project it was appreciated. Another point was that each Council Member should be informed equally. This was a major goal. However, individual Council Members may approach a staff member anyway. The regular practice was to provide a response to all Council Members if a question was asked to keep the Council equally informed. When individual Council Members contact staff outside of that policy, it may create unequal distribution of information. It was difficult. The Council was respected and there was no way to please all the citizens all of the time. It was impossible. However, the hope was that sometimes the Council would just make the difficult decisions and realize that some folks were not going to be happy. It was understood that Council was trying to make this process less painful, but staff needed the opportunity to do this. There was more to come and the workload and processes needed to be carefully considered. Public Information should not ever take a step backward. It would be fine if the entire line-by-line budget was put out for public information. The impact on staff was trying to be evaluated now as well. Staff was prepared to legitimize expenses and policies and expenditures were constantly being reviewed. The goal, even with the cut budget was to come in at 90% of the estimated budget and still get the job done. There were occasions where folks did expend too much money, but they were talked with when that occurred.

Jeanne Hooks, Budget Manager stated that staff was proactive. A quarterly report of some nature was being worked on. Another consideration was how to measure once performance took place to show the Council and the community how things were being done and at what cost. Staff was proactive and this was constantly occurring.

Council Member Murry stated that he would like a Budget Committee established comprised of staff, public, Committee Members and Council Members to review the LRF and budget creation. They would come up with the current committee structure.

Ms. Hooks stated that it was important that folks on this Committee understand the services the town provided. One group considered was the Morrisville 101 graduates and other groups that had already received training in all levels and they have showed a voluntary interest in the community.

Council Consensus was to have a Committee or Panel.

Ms. Hooks stated that a focus group setting sounded like what the Council was looking for to reach the most folks as possible and receive a good sample of the community. The request would be to continue research a bit further and have further discussion.

Council Member Stohlman stated that it should include Council, staff and public at a minimum.

Council Consensus was in agreement.

Council Member Lyons stated that each member should select one person that they would like to see on the Committee that was optional.

Council Member Snyder stated that any person should be able to be recommended.

Council Member Murry stated that qualifications should be considered. A current committee charter should be used as a structure.

Mr. Whitson stated that staff could provide input and data, but probably did not need to vote on the Committee. Another consideration was how many elected officials should serve on the committee. The Council needed to decide if they were prepared to receive information from this group.

Mayor Pro-Tem Johnson stated that this group would not decide on cuts or changes to the budget. They were more of a way to inform people and not to try to influence them.

Council Member Stohlman stated that it was more for reporting and discussing any differential. Folks may feel more comfortable having these discussions with citizens versus staff or the Council.

Mayor Faulkner stated that she heard Council Member Murry indicate that these folks want to make suggestions and changes to the budget.

Mr. Whitson repeated what he understood the goal to be. This group could review execution of the budget. A report could be drafted and explained to this group regarding performance of the budget. Then it could be published. That fiscal responsibilities and the town's budget were reviewed would be the goal.

Council Consensus was in agreement.

Mayor Faulkner stated that the last item listed on the agenda for discussion tonight, "Town Council voting at all meetings" could be discussed at the next work session.

Council Member Murry stated that it may be able to be tacked on to a short regular meeting prior to the next work session if possible. Also to add to this item could be discussion of having a Public Address at every meeting.

Mayor Faulkner adjourned the meeting at 9:10 pm.

Adopted this the 9th day of December, 2008.

Jan Faulkner, Mayor

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Diana R. Davis, Town Clerk