



Town of Franklin Board of Aldermen

Retreat Discussion

February 20, 2017

5:00 p.m.

1. Call to Order- Mayor Bob Scott
2. Adoption of the February 20, 2017 Retreat Agenda
3. Discussion on Downtown Streetscape Proposals
4. Comprehensive Improvements Plan for Town Sidewalks
5. Whitmire Property
6. ABC Store
7. Room Occupancy Tax
8. Other Considerations/Discussions
9. Adjourn

February 20, 2017 meeting,

The Town of Franklin Board of Aldermen held a special called retreat on Monday February 20, 2017 at 7 p.m. in the Town Hall Board Room. Mayor Bob Scott presided. Vice-mayor Patti Abel, Aldermen Adam Kimsey, Billy Mashburn, Brandon McMahan, and Barbara McRae were present.

Alderman Joe Collins came later.

Public Comment

No member from the public spoke.

Adoption of the February 20, 2017 Agenda

Motion was made by McRae, seconded by Abel to adopt the February 20, 2017 Retreat Agenda as presented. Motion carried. Vote: 4 to 0.

Discussion on Downtown Streetscape Proposals

Summer Woodard – Town Manager – We started looking at this again at our October retreat. What you have before you are the proposals that most of you are familiar with. One is the Vaughn Melton proposal that looks at making Main Street into one lane which cost \$11,000 and to do phase two is \$26,200 and phase three is \$35,200. The next proposal is from McGill which costs \$15,200. The third proposal is the J.M. Teague Parking Analysis that was done in 2015. It is a completed study and to enact that study \$172,950. I wanted to get the feel of the board, whether there is anything you are interested in or whether you want to leave it as is.

Mayor Scott – We're not bound to doing one of these studies. We could also do something on our own. I asked Lilly Vitale about doing a survey of people. We met with three engineers from the Department of Transportation and I would say that they are okay of trying this trial of one lane.

Summer Woodard – Town Manager – This does seem like something they are willing to let us do. They did have some concerns and suggestions for up near Motor Company Grill where the road would divide back into two lanes. They did want the town to look at it because in a 15 minute peak at 5 p.m. they had over 4,000 cars that went on Main Street so they were concerned that it could back up traffic. Other than that I do think they would be willing to partner with the town as far as coming up with a plan so it may not affect parking lanes as much.

Alderman McRae – There is no way to know unless we try it. I hate to spend so much money only to find out that it's not going to work. Justin Setser and I were talking today and he had some really good ideas about streetscaping. Maybe we could do some things in house that are as good or better than what our consultants are thinking. Maybe we could look at making the sidewalks wider. We could possibly grade the edge down and make it slope up to the sidewalk.

Mayor Scott – Would the board support maybe a trial before the tourists get back and maybe just seeing how a one lane will go?

Aldermen McRae – We have talked about hiring an engineer. This is the kind of thing that an engineer could really come up with something great. Are we still thinking about hiring an engineer?

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Summer Woodard – Town Manager – We are actually advertising. We're looking to maybe close advertisement around the first of April and then maybe do some interviews. We've had 5 applicants and hoping to get more.

Mayor Scott – In trying this, we may know within the first hour whether this thing is going to work or not.

Alderman McMahan – I think I'm definitely in favor of trying it.

Comprehensive Improvements Plan for Town Sidewalks

Summer Woodard – Town Manager – I just wanted to discuss something with the board since the Bike and Pedestrian Plan could possibly be voted on at our next meeting. Something that our Town Planner Justin Setser and I discussed is that we do have some existing sidewalks on a rotating plan to fix. We thought it might be a benefit to the board to start an in-house committee similar to the one we have for water and sewer. We were thinking that maybe in the next two weeks that Ms. McRae from the streets committee and Mr. McMahan from the sidewalks committee could meet with myself, Mr. Setser, and our Public Works Director to finalize some of the sidewalks that we have on our current list and to look at some of the ones that have been brought to our attention through the Bike and Pedestrian Plan. Some of the improvements on the plan will be able to be done in-house. We were actually able to fix the one that is in front of Town Hall that was installed wrong many years ago. The longer distance projects will take more of a contract crew but your public works crew has been instrumental in the last few months with working on smaller projects. I just thought this may be something to discuss with those two board members and Public Works Director Jay Gibson and myself in regards to some concrete plans.

Alderman McMahan – That idea that was mentioned a time or two about having a dedicated team who would just focus on sidewalks. Is that something that the board could pursue and try to work into the next budget? Or is that further down the road than that?

Summer Woodard – Town Manager – That is certainly something you could look at. Mr. Setser and Town Clerk Travis Tallent have spoken about a gentleman possibly coming in from NC Department of Transportation to do some onsite training for sidewalk repair that our crews can attend. It would certainly be more cost effective to do that. However with other projects, the length may make it better to look into contracting somebody.

Room Occupancy Tax

Mayor Scott – Currently we have a three percent room occupancy tax, but by law we could go as high as 6 percent. The League of Municipalities is lobbying the NC legislature to loosen the requirements for what we can spend room occupancy tax on. Right now it can only be spent on billboards and advertising. Right now the thinking is that we need to be spending some money on the amenities that the tourists find when they come here, that makes Franklin so attractive. I think the Tourism Development Authority would weigh in on it but by final analysis, I think the board has the authority to decide.

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Alderman Mashburn – I don't think we have to ask the Tourism Development Authority. We do have to go to the legislature though to get approval.

Mayor Scott – It's a local bill issue, but Maggie Valley got shut down recently. Their representative did not support their request to increase. It is something to look at because more and more people are beginning to look at the saturation of advertisement as oppose using those funds to improve the things that people come here to experience. There is also a push for a state bill that would allow towns and TDAs to have more control over how those funds are spent.

Alderman McRae – I don't think I would want more tax unless we can use it the way that we want.

Mayor Scott – We may want to come up with a plan of how we might spend that money and work with the TDA then approach the legislature.

Other Considerations/Discussions

Mayor Scott – The League of Municipalities is taking on a number of issues right now. The one that really concerns me is that it looks like there will be bills introduced to require the towns to run on partisan elections. They also want to make municipal elections on even years where we will be competing with state and federal elections. We're going to get lost. Local elections will be pushed aside. The League of Municipalities is on record opposing making the elections partisan. How do you all feel about it?

Alderman McCrae – It's terrible. I like nonpartisan.

Alderman McMahan – What is the reasoning? What is their narrative?

Mayor Scott – Well I can give my opinion. One thing I've heard is that if you run partisan, people will know what you stand for. The other is that it would be cost effective. Right now the municipal elections are paid for by the town having the election so it's nothing out of the state's pocket. They also want to make judges, boards of education and most everything else that is non-partisan, partisan. Keep your eye on that. It will affect most of the towns here in the west. Cities and Towns are facing an erosion of their authority. The League and the towns are acutely aware of this and they are ready to do battle over it. Another thing that the legislature has moved to remove impact fees. Sales tax redistribution is being discussed again and how those funds will come back to towns and counties. Everybody is waiting to see if we are going to get any help for infrastructure.

Alderman McMahan – Realistically is there anything that can be done about the elections going partisan? Or are they just going to do what they want to do?

Mayor Scott – No I think if people call their representatives and voice their concern that it will die in committee. It has before and I think it possibly could again. We've got to try. I think that's the biggest thing on the radar that could affect municipalities.

Alderman Collins – Would Republicans benefit from this?

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Mayor Scott – Absolutely.

Alderman Collins – Then it will go through.

Summer Woodard – Town Manager – In concern to the bridge work, it looks like over the next couple of weeks, the NCDOT will look to divert traffic on that bridge. There are some migratory bats that could be affected so I know they are watching that.

Mayor Scott – I talked to Chief Adams today about reducing that speed limit to 20. I think it will work out.

Whitmire Property

Alderman Joe Collins – It appears that any impediments for us to do something with the property, mainly the house being cleaned up has been done. We own the property. I think the real issue for the board is do we sell it and let the purchaser make the call on what it's used for or do we in some degree or fashion keep control over what we want it to be used for? Maybe we should do some research. Maybe we should talk to Tommy Jenkins and consider where we want to go. There is also a good argument for cutting some tree and making it look good then putting a for sale sign on it. But I just think that we need to make a decision.

Alderman McRae – Do we want it for public or private use? Maybe we should do a study. Ideal would be mixed commercial or residential. Maybe we could use it for a park or a civic center.

Alderman Collins – My mind isn't going towards a park. And for a civic center we would need substantial support from the private because civic centers, after a number of years get to where they need new roofs and new HVAC units. It can be a very significant investment.

Alderman McRae – Another idea could be a trade. Maybe there is another piece of property that would be better suited for us that we could pursue a trade for.

Alderman Kimsey – Haven't I heard that the county has had some interest in that piece of property in the past? In talking about the Economic Development Commission, I don't think involving them and the county is a bad option. If we don't have a good idea, maybe they do.

Alderman McMahan – I agree with Alderman Collins that regardless of the direction the board decides on, we should do something with it.

Alderman McRae passed out information about the Development Finance Initiative.

Alderman McRae – This is an agency that was set up by the UNC School of Government to do exactly what we've talked about. You hire them on contract and they do studies about public/private partnerships, and developments, assessments of distress properties. They've done some fantastic work in the state and they have a website. You can see some of the projects they've done. One thing was a parking garage. They've also done a lot of historical preservation. I don't know what they charge but they have graduate students that work with them. It's just a possibility for getting the kind of answers that we may be looking for.

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Alderman Collins – Is there someone that would want to argue that we should just clean it up and a put a for sale sign on it?

Alderman McRae – I would argue against that.

Alderman Collins – I heard that but I just want to know if there is a consensus to go either way. There could be an argument to sell it for what it is valued at, but I think whatever it is, I think it's time to start looking seriously at it.

Mayor Scott – How would the board feel about contacting these folks just to see?

Alderman McRae – We could see what the cost may be.

Alderman Collins – Is there any rational reason that the town would want to keep the cane growing between the property and the road? The property is hidden in plain sight. It just doesn't make much sense to keep it.

Mayor Scott – If it's okay, the Manager and myself could contact Michael Lemanski and tell him we have project for him. Barbara would you work with us on that? I think the cost is negligible.

Alderman McMahan – I don't see a problem in contacting them.

Summer Woodard – Town Manager – I'd be glad to contact them.

ABC Store

Alderman Collins – My understanding is that the store is under a lease until a year from this upcoming November. There is an option for a three year renewal. It's my understanding that right now it is \$8,500 a month as rent and then there is a component of common area maintenance and taxes. I don't know how that is billed exactly but I do know that it totals over \$100,000 on an annual basis for the cost at that location. I would hope that we could, while working with the ABC Board, see if there are better options that we may be better able to utilize when the lease is up. It could be that we see if there is a better place to go. Similar shopping centers look to be about \$10 per square foot. Our manager has advised that 5,000 square feet is optimal. We're at 6,500 now because it was available. So we're paying well over the \$10 a square foot, plus we're paying for about 1,500 square feet that we do not need. Another option could be that we find a better location and build where after a number of years and if we round it off to \$100,000, you could amortize to a substantial building in six or eight years. The Town is the effective residual beneficiary in that whatever is earned isn't having to be spent. Then again with the notice out that we're looking, it could be that the current landlord is willing to set down and look at the cost of rent. I personally don't think we have much to lose when we're talking about \$100,000 a year in rent. It is worth exploring. I think it would be good management for us to work with the ABC Board and see what's out there.

Mayor Scott – Does anybody see a downside?

Alderman McMahan – Not really. Have you spoken to anybody on the ABC Board about this?

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Alderman Collins – Yes. We spoke with the manager of the store, Todd Mason. The ABC Board has some hurt feelings for lack of a better word over the last cycle where there was an attempt to put it at the new Wal-Mart Shopping Center. I can tell you that there is not a push on the Board to do anything. I don't expect to get a lot of energy from them but Todd says that he would sell it from the back of a truck if that is what the Town says. So yes, I have spoken to Todd and I've spoken to others but I don't expect for it to be something that they are real anxious about pursuing.

Alderman Kimsey – So what is the best method of going about this?

Summer Woodard – Town Manager – I don't care to reach out to Mr. Mason and the Board to get their thoughts on it. I will also talk with legal counsel to see what authority we have over the ABC Board. To make sure everything works out. It's certainly an idea worth exploring to get a feel publicly of what that Board feels as well.

Other Items – Indian Mound Revitalization

Alderman McRae – Let me fill the Board in on what has been going on with Nikwasi Initiative and Mountain Partners and various activities regarding the Indian Mound and the Corridor. The Heritage Corridor encompasses important Cherokee and pioneer sites. It's local history. The Cowee School is an important part of it but the most important part is the Nikwasi Mound, at least in my opinion. This would be the origin of the Corridor here in Franklin. Main Spring adopted this project originally and developed Mountain Partners with representatives from Franklin, Macon County, various agencies in Cherokee and individuals. They try to keep it nonpolitical. I was there as a local historian rather than a town representative. As things have developed a lot has happened. Here is a conceptual short range plan for the Nikwasi Mound. Next to the river is work that shows parking and sidewalks. That is the Main Spring building. Duncan's is next door. That has been all cleaned up and is now being landscaped. Right across the street is the Kahn property that the Department of Transportation bought. As I understand the property will most likely be held by Main Spring or the Town for public purposes. Main Spring also holds the Simpson tract and is looking to do another clean up there. That tract includes a small sliver of land by Main Street. This plan shows a walk way that joins the town's tract. I want to talk to you tonight about the Dan's Auto building. Main Spring now has a contract on it. There is a six month due diligence period. It's not their intention to own the property eventually. This is the reason that the Nikwasi initiative was created. The Nikwasi Initiative is a community development organization which is a nonprofit and it has board members. Tommy Jenkins is on it, several people from Cherokee, Ben Lassiter, Stacy Guffey, and several other people. Whenever you're dealing with property you want to be careful with what you come out and talk about publicly. Since Main Spring now has the contracts in hand we can start to talk about what we're doing. It's amazing the amount of investment that has been made in this corridor over the last 10 years, including the Greenway. There is an estimate of \$4 million in the Greenway and the Mound. This Corridor also follows the Trail of Tears. We are part of the national historic trail. That's a park service thing so it means that there is a lot of money associated to it. A lot of things are coming together around the area now. Just in the last two years a lot of improvements have happened. It's exciting. The Nikwasi Initiative is organized. We have formed a corporation that will be a nonprofit. So it can hold this Dan's Auto property.

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Obviously we're going to need money. We have some people who are really well versed in grant writing. We want to do a feasibility study on the building and an economic study. So we're looking for grant funds for that. Hopefully what comes out of that will help us obtain other money. Perhaps it could be retail space, or a museum. Maybe a visitor's center. What we're hoping for is buy-in from the town, the county, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and Main Spring. We have a budget. The estimated start-up costs is about \$50,000. We're hoping to get that money from partners and we're hoping that the Town would be a partner in this. It is such a vital part of revitalizing that part of town. I think the possibilities of what this could bring to Franklin is enormous. If the Town could invest \$5,000 to \$12,000, somewhere in that range we could get this started. The money itself is important but it is just as important to be able to tell investors that these agencies are behind us.

Alderman Collins – You're starting to get some things coming together so there are opportunities. There is some desire. Years ago a local attorney said that he made it a point, that if somebody was coming to Franklin or visiting Franklin he would make them take the exit on the south side of town and come in from there rather than come in through East Franklin because it was just dismal in its looks. So if in fact there is this inertia that could lead towards enhancing it, I'd really hate to see it go by.

Alderman McMahan – I agree, 100%.

Alderman McRae – I think it's going to happen. I think we're all on the same page, I think we're all excited.

Mayor Scott – I have always thought that the greatest asset that you have doesn't come into play much and that is the Whitmire Property and how it could possibly fit into it. It could be a living village, a pioneer village. We have the woods up there.

Alderman McRae – I think it's important to note that we are starting to get private investment down there like the new brewery right on the river. It's not just the park. Parks are a great idea but it is also good to have retail or a restaurant that people can go to.

Other Items: Sidewalk Discussion

Alderman Collins – Would you provide a summary of the sidewalk discussion?

Summer Woodard – Town Manager – We discussed forming a Sidewalk Committee. We have your streets appointment, Ms. McRae and your sidewalks representative, Mr. McMahan that would meet with myself, Public Works Director Jay Gibson and Town Planner Justin Setser to discuss a comprehensive improvement plan to discuss the existing sidewalks that we know need to be replaced. Also introducing some sidewalks that were brought to our attention through the Bike and Pedestrian Planning Grant. We're also starting to move in the direction of trying to do some things in house. One thing we did last week, there was an issue with a curb and we were able to fix that in house. Mr. Tallent, myself, and Justin Setser have been working to have Department of Transportation come in free of charge and train some of our crew members on how to pour and do some sidewalk work. So that is something we want to take advantage of. We plan on trying to do more things in house. We want to do like we do with Water and Sewer and have regular meetings with our Sidewalks Committee.

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Alderman Kimsey – What is the town’s stance on seeking grants? Is there much out there? Is it worth the time?

Summer Woodard – Town Manager – It depends on what you want to use the grants for. It’s limited unless it’s water and sewer right now.

Other Items: Pickin’ on the Square

Alderman Kimsey – I have heard some talk and I thought this might be a good year to look at expanding, improving, and modernizing Pickin’ on the Square. I’m not necessarily commenting either way.

Alderman Collins – Were the comments that they didn’t want it or want to see it made better?

Alderman Kimsey – In general they seem to want to see more. Most comments are that they would want to see more or different and of course there are people who would tell you the opposite. I’m not taking a stand either way but I wondered if there is any interest of the Board in approaching the public in some capacity. Obviously they’re already there on Saturday nights so maybe we could capture their opinions and ideas.

Alderman McRae – We’ve talked about it before. Maybe having some diversity and different kinds of music.

Alderman Collins – Donnie Clay has been the backbone of this for years. He still is. I can’t imagine that there is a need to do much more than tweak it with Donnie there. And I’m not saying get rid of Donnie. He does a good job.

Alderman Abel – What if we created another option? Like Family Friday Evenings? Maybe once a month. We could have this perfect amphitheater if we take out these trees. It’s totally unused but it would get families out.

Mayor Scott – I go about every Saturday night and you’re right, it’s mostly older folks.

Alderman Kimsey – I think the spirit of it is still something that attracts people, even hikers from the Appalachian Trail. That’s why I don’t want to make any blanket statements in regards to it. It interests some people and it doesn’t interest others and it’s about how you bridge that. It’s not necessarily mean expanding that event. It may mean working on other ideas. I’ve got lots of ideas but they are all kind of pointless without public buy-in.

Mayor Scott – One thing I’ve heard is that some people want more variety in the music but I can tell you that the people that are there will fight you over it. They love it.

Alderman Kimsey – And I agree with variety, but the variety doesn’t have to replace what is on that stage.

Mayor Scott – We also have six nights a week where the Gazebo isn’t being used and we could have any number of shows on the square.

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Summer Woodard – Town Manager – Just to throw this out there. One thing that Sylva does, they rotate the music each weekend where Sylva will pay one weekend then the Chamber of Commerce pays for one weekend, their county pays for one weekend. That's why they're able to have such a variety. They have so much buy-in from different groups.

Mayor Scott – Yeah what about the Arts Council? They could do something up there. There is any number of things.

Other Items: Engineer

Alderman Collins – Just real quick, where are we with the Engineer?

Summer Woodard – Town Manager – We have about five applicants so far. We are going to close advertisement on that around the first of April and then hopefully have interviews around the middle of April. It is still in this year's budget and we plan on budgeting for the position again in the next fiscal budget. We're trying to get some different recruitment strategies out there. We're making progress.

Miscellaneous: Discussion of Local Youth and Town Board

Mayor Scott – Lilly Vitale what do people your age say about what the Town is or is not doing?

Lilly Vitale – I don't think people my age really grasp the concept of government besides the General Assembly or the President. I don't really think they know a lot about the Town Board. I've been interested in politics for a while and I didn't really know much about the Town Board until I started interning here. I mostly knew more about the County Commissioners.

Mayor Scott – What can we do to enhance the standing and the interest in your age group as a Town?

Lilly Vitale – I don't think people my age really understand what the Town Board does. Maybe working with the schools to change their curriculum some. In Civics we don't really focus on the Town or municipalities. We mostly cover federal government, Supreme Court and that kind of stuff. In Civics we had a day where the District Attorney came and we understood better of what she does. It gave a familiar face to the position. Maybe going to the schools and talking would help.

Alderman McRae – Do you think that people would understand better what we do if we were called Town Board Members or something like that if we were called something besides Aldermen or Alderwomen?

Lilly Vitale – I think the first step would be getting them familiar with the Town Board and what the Town Board does but I guess that's a good point.

Mayor Scott – Barbara, I am tired of Aldermen being known as old men.

Alderman Abel – I had never heard the term Aldermen before I came to North Carolina. I always heard councilman.

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Mayor Scott – What would be the Board’s feeling of changing it to council members? Alderman isn’t exactly generic, it’s aimed towards men. Alderwoman is very awkward. Brandon would you go for it?

Alderman McMahan – Sure. For me it’s six in one, half a dozen in another but I understand the objection when we have women on the board and Alderwomen is an awkward word. And I think alder is rooted in the word elder. It sounds like it may be like the town elders. I think of old men. Not that there is anything wrong with that.

Alderman Kimsey – I would have absolutely no problem with changing it.

Alderman Abel – I’m fine with it either way. I don’t care about the political correctness. I don’t want people to think that I have an issue with it.

Alderman Collins – Yeah it’s not the highest thing on my list.

Mayor Scott – But it wouldn’t cost anything. What would be the cost?

Summer Woodard – Town Manager – You would have to redo your ordinance book. You would have to get legal counsel involved as well because it would be an amendment to your charter.

Mayor Scott – I will do a little research and come back to this because I for one don’t think it’s fair to the women on the board that everybody is known as Aldermen. I think we are one of the few towns left that use the term Aldermen.

Tim Reeves – The Franklin Press – The definition is ‘older man.’

Adjournment

**Motion was made by Collins, seconded by Abel to adjourn the meeting at 6:45 p.m. Motion carried.
Vote: 5 to 0.**

Robert S. Scott, Mayor

Travis Tallent, Town Clerk

