

Salisbury, North Carolina
January 7, 2020

SPECIAL MEETING

PRESENT: Mayor Karen Alexander, Presiding; Council Members William Brian Miller, David Post, and Tamara Sheffield; City Manager W. Lane Bailey; Deputy City Clerk Tiffany Crook; and City Attorney J. Graham Corriher.

ABSENT: Mayor Pro Tem Al Heggins and City Clerk Diane Gilmore.

Mayor Alexander and members of City Council met in a Special session in Council Chambers at City Hall located at 217 South Main Street. The meeting began at 5:00 p.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Thereupon, Councilmember Post made a **motion** to adopt the agenda as presented. Mayor Alexander and Councilmembers Miller, Post, and Sheffield voted AYE. (4-0)

PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

Parks and Recreation Director Nick Aceves introduced Ms. Beth Poovey of Land Design and Mr. Brad Chambers from the Kelly Group who worked on developing the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. He stated over the past 18 months staff, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, and citizens have provided input for the plan's development.

Ms. Poovey stated the process of creating a Parks and Recreation Master Plan for Salisbury began by understanding the makeup of the community. She explained the Plan will help guide the Parks and Recreation Department throughout the next several years, and she added a Comprehensive Master Plan is typically created every 10 years. She stated the plan should be updated within seven to 10 years.

Ms. Poovey stated the Parks and Recreation Department should change with the community to ensure its offerings continue to meet citizen needs. She explained her team visited parks, talked to staff, and viewed community offerings. She pointed out a survey was conducted which included several feedback sessions. She indicated the information was used to determine the needs of the community, implementation strategies, and recommendations.

Mr. Chambers thanked Council for allowing him to assist with the Master Plan. He stated his team used quantitative surveys, qualitative research, and observation to make recommendations in comparison to national standards.

Ms. Poovey reviewed the City's demographics, and she pointed out the slow population growth within Salisbury. She stated the City has a diverse population, and different needs were observed within various communities. She noted the City's per capita income is lower when compared to Rowan County and North Carolina as a whole. She indicated it is important to take into account the City is less affluent when thinking about access and equitability for people trying to get into programs.

Mr. Chambers stated Salisbury is an aging community and it is important to think about the things that would make sense for a large baby boom population. He suggested an increase in the number of passive parks, senior centers, greenways, and trails.

Ms. Poovey stated once they had an understanding of the community, meetings were held with staff, key leaders in the neighborhoods, and citizens. She noted the top findings from the community meetings included maintenance and budget concerns. She explained maintenance has changed and areas which were previously maintained by the Parks and Recreation Department are now maintained through Public Services. She commented Community Park, which is located outside of the City limits, is maintained by the City. She referenced several unimproved lots which are included in the park system but where services are not provided. She stated restroom access at some parks is a major concern, and she pointed out the porta-johns spread throughout the parks do not represent the City well.

Ms. Poovey noted community events were a top choice people felt were important to the community. She added there was a level of satisfaction regarding events within the community, but there was a lack of awareness regarding the offerings. She commented more greenways and trails were requested along with greater investment in youth sports and activities.

Ms. Poovey pointed out what is needed and wanted most among citizens is a multiuse indoor recreation complex and a nature center where recreation and programming needs can be met.

Mr. Chambers noted there is a growing population of active seniors in the City, and seniors want to hike, play, be active, and do the things they were doing 20 years ago

which is a national trend.

Mr. Chambers explained downsized sports, such as smaller courts for various sports including pickleball and basketball, is a growing trend. He suggested half basketball courts instead of full courts can be used to maximize space and provide more programs and activities. He stated splash pads should be used rather than pools. He added technology advances allow for easier calculation of participation numbers.

Mr. Chambers stated all-in-one centers that include nature centers, office space, social services, and commercial sponsorships are currently trending nationally. Ms. Poovey added the national trends are what can be looked at as Salisbury is measured against communities of comparable size.

Mr. Chambers indicated the City was compared to Hickory, North Carolina and Roswell, Georgia. He explained Hickory was chosen due to its size and location, and Roswell was chosen because it has a gold medal winning, certified department. Ms. Poovey stated the primary takeaways from the comparisons were Rosewell has a 53% expenditure recovery from non-taxed revenues and Hickory utilizes 52% of its budget for park maintenance.

Councilmember Miller asked if there were numbers to show how Salisbury compared in those two categories. Mr. Aceves pointed out the City's numbers are harder to compare because the City provides maintenance through Public Services. Mr. Chambers stated the team tried to pull maintenance as a dollar for dollar comparison but it was difficult because of the connection with Public Services. He mentioned the national standard for maintenance is approximately 47% of a Parks and Recreation Department budget and recommended Salisbury strive to achieve the national standard to keep parks and facilities enjoyable.

Mayor Alexander asked if the new plan would get the City closer to the national average. Mr. Aceves stated when he arrived several years ago the budget for the Parks and Recreation Department was approximately \$2.6 million including maintenance. He noted now it is approximately \$1.6 million without maintenance. He pointed out the Parks and Recreation budget is a work in progress and there is discussion regarding maintenance funds.

Ms. Poovey added unimproved lots are being maintained within the Parks and Recreation Budget that are not serving as park facilities. Mayor Alexander asked if the unimproved lots were among the properties the City has put on the market. Mr. Aceves stated staff is looking at lots that are no longer used as parks and examining the possibility of redesigning the lots to be better utilized by the City and to decrease public service maintenance.

Ms. Poovey noted the City has 29 parks, 5.2 miles of greenways, 20 miles of trails, four recreation centers, a community center pool and a splash pad. She stated when thinking about how easy it is for people to access parks and facilities there is a

national goal of either a quarter-mile or a half-mile of access.

Ms. Poovey presented a map to Council showing residents within a half-mile radius from parks and facilities and an inverse of the map which showed areas without easy access. She pointed out four plots of land currently owned by the City and stated if they were turned into park facilities this would decrease the unserved areas. She stated there is a lot of opportunity once the City starts to utilize what it has.

Mayor Alexander questioned the need to increase the number of parks if the number of children is not growing significantly. She stated the City would need different types of parks.

Mr. Chambers stated there is a need for more passive parks rather than active parks. He explained a passive park would allow people to walk and bring kids for free play without expensive equipment to maintain. He added the park would serve all age groups.

Ms. Poovey stated the National Parks and Recreation Standards are good to use for comparison. She noted the national standard for park land is 9.8 acres of land per one thousand residents, and Salisbury currently has 15 acres per thousand residents. She added the City is not at a deficit of providing parks.

Councilmember Post asked if the statistics on acreage included Community Park which is outside the City limits. Ms. Poovey responded positively and added Community Park does skew results in a minor way. She stated no matter who owns Community Park, it is classified as a regional park and is a great asset to the community.

Ms. Poovey stated she compared the number of sport facilities to national standards and found the City was negative by one soccer field and positive by three baseball fields. She noted the deficit in facilities within the City is very small which places the City inline with national standards in this category. She stated there is no need for new sport facilities. She added the statistics will not likely change significantly due to slow population growth.

Ms. Poovey stated under general policy she recommends creating pocket parks and plazas. She pointed out properties that are not being used and are too small to be considered parks can add value to open spaces throughout the City. She added the areas could serve as gathering places.

Ms. Poovey suggested the City focus on neighborhood and community parks and improve accessibility to these areas to insure they are within walking distance to most homes. She also noted the importance of transferring Community Park to Rowan County for maintenance and setting up a funding agreement.

Ms. Poovey suggested the addition of a multipurpose center which could include the combination of a senior center, nature center, and a community gathering place. She

stated adding restrooms to key facilities, addressing deferred maintenance, and adding way finding and identification signage to parks would also benefit the City. She added shared use agreements with school systems need to be established along with reassessing the City's rental and usage policies.

Mr. Chambers stated Salisbury's Parks and Recreation Department was compared to national and state standards for self-generated cost recovery and was low on the scale. He pointed out there is great opportunity to generate revenue from users of facilities rather than from sales and property taxes. He mentioned once the new Bell Tower Green is completed there will be a demand to rent it which will increase revenue.

Mr. Chambers stated when updating neighborhood and community parks amenities need to be added that relate to the neighborhood demographic. He suggested there is a need for an additional senior center within the City. Councilmember Miller asked why there is a need for two senior centers. Mr. Chambers stated based on the City's population of aging adults one center will become overwhelmed. He mentioned a new senior center could be in the form of a multipurpose center for all age groups.

Mayor Alexander asked if it was possible to partner with the YMCA or other facilities that need members. Mr. Aceves stated his department is in constant conversation with the YMCA and other facilities regarding various programs and have increased programs at Hall Gym and Miller Gym for seniors and active adults, but space is very limited.

Ms. Poovey stated a community center could accommodate amenities the citizens are requesting. She suggested along with a new multipurpose center, repurposing the civic center, expanding the greenway system, and leveraging the Bell Tower Green.

Ms. Poovey commended Salisbury on hosting high quality events and urged the City to continue to provide this great service. She stated there is a high level of satisfaction from events but the citizens would like more programs. She mentioned a nature center was a popular request along with more summer camps, programs for baby boomers and other age groups, and increased health and wellness partnerships.

Mr. Chambers recommended implementing a work order tracking system to allow Public Services and the Parks and Recreation Department to review new, in-progress, and completed tasks. He stated maintenance funding should be increased as the budget allows, and the City should strive to become Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) certified. He also mentioned Hurley Park could use a maintenance facility and plans for the Bell Tower Green should be worked out prior to its completion.

Mayor Alexander stated the City is working with Bell Tower Green in the planning process. She suggested the City reach out to the Environmental Center and create a partnership with Catawba College. Mr. Aceves mentioned he has spoken with Public Services Director Craig Powers and Storm Water Technician Michael Hannah

about nature programs. Mayor Alexander stated it is a great idea to create educational programs for adults and children.

Ms. Poovey stated there is an action plan that goes with the Master Plan with recommendations for the highest priorities. She noted the action plan also identifies the persons responsible for taking actions within the Plan and summarizes the general key points that are recommended for the City.

Councilmember Miller asked how investments in active parks attract a younger demographic. He stated the City has an aging population but if investments are only made toward senior services this would attract more seniors. He mentioned the senior population will one day decline so it will be wise to invest in all age groups.

Ms. Poovey agreed with Councilmember Miller and stated there should be a balance of active versus passive parks. She recommended the City focus on maintenance, diversity of offerings, and accessibility to parks and programs. She stated investments in parks and recreation facilities will attract people of all demographics to the community.

Councilmember Miller asked if a point had been determined to require pocket parks for developments based on size. Mr. Chambers stated there is a policy in place but Salisbury has had little to no new developments recently. He mentioned the policy states there should be a certain amount of acreage per housing unit or acreage per population based on multifamily and single family housing.

Councilmember Post asked for the three to five most important points the City should focus on. Ms. Poovey suggested investing in greenways, leveraging the Bell Tower Green, and continuing to host high quality events. Mr. Chambers mentioned investing in a multipurpose center and repurposing the civic center to meet many of the needs identified in the Plan.

Councilmember Sheffield stated she appreciated the thorough report given to Council. She requested a summary of the recommendations and asked for the date of the last Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Mr. Aceves stated the last Plan was completed between 2009 and 2010.

Councilmember Sheffield asked what was implemented from the last Plan. Mr. Aceves stated one of the recommendations from the last Plan was to upgrade the greenways which was done but other recommendations included large projects that were never completed. He noted the current stability within the department and expressed hope in seeing the current Plan through.

Councilmember Sheffield stated feedback is the best information and asked for recommendations on how to better inform citizens and make them aware of the many offerings from the Parks and Recreation Department.

Mr. Aceves stated he noticed the lack of awareness of activities and events when

he came to the department. He mentioned his staff has put great effort into notifying the community and have recently had to turn people away from programs because of tickets selling out.

Councilmember Sheffield thanked Mr. Aceves and his department for a phenomenal job on community events and becoming familiar faces to community.

Councilmember Miller stated having a Master Plan should give the City leverage for outside funding grants. Ms. Poovey agreed the Master Plan is critical in obtaining funds.

Mayor Alexander asked the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board members to stand and be recognized and acknowledged Mr. Paul Woodson, former Mayor of Salisbury. She also asked the Parks and Recreation Department staff to stand and be recognized. She stated they are second to none and thanked them for all they do. She stated she looks forward to the implementation of the Master Plan.

Thereupon Councilmember Post made a **motion** to adopt the Parks and Recreation Master Plan as presented. Mayor Alexander and Councilmembers Miller, Post, and Sheffield voted AYE. (4-0)

PICKLEBALL COURTS

Mr. Aceves informed Council of an update regarding pickleball courts. He stated the issue was readdressed at an Advisory Board meeting and there was a unanimous vote to convert existing tennis courts to pickleball courts.

Mayor Alexander stated Council normally would not ratify an advisory board's decision.

Councilmember Miller stated he supports the decision to convert the courts for pickleball but would like to see the topic brought back to Council. He stated a full presentation should be given on the Advisory Board's decision with notice to the public that it will be discussed.

Mayor Alexander agreed with Councilmember Miller and stated the item will be brought back as an Agenda Item. She thanked Mr. Aceves and the presenters of the Master Plan.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Councilmember Post. All Council members in attendance agreed unanimously to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 6:03 p.m.



Karen Alexander, Mayor



Tiffany Crook, Deputy City Clerk