

CITY OF EDEN, N.C.

A special meeting - Annual Advisory Group Coordination - of the City Council, City of Eden, was held on Thursday, June 10, 2021 at 6 p.m. in the Eden Room, 308 E. Stadium Drive. Those present for the meeting were as follows:

Mayor:	Neville Hall
Council Members:	Darryl Carter Gerald Ellis Jerry Epps Angela Hampton (absent) Phillip Hunnicutt Bernie Moore Bruce Nooe
City Manager:	Jon Mendenhall
City Clerk:	Deanna Hunt
City Attorney:	Erin Gilley
News Media:	Roy Sawyers, Rockingham Update

Staff present: Cindy Adams, Marketing & Special Events Manager; Tammie McMichael, Director of Finance & Personnel; Clint Simpson, Police Chief/Assistant City Manager; Kelly Stultz, Director of Planning & Community Development; and Terry Vernon, Interim Director of Parks & Recreation.

Advisory board members present: Board of Adjustment – Will Flynt and Charlie Johnson; Community Appearance Commission – Debbie Ellis and Julie Talbert; Historic Preservation Commission – Blanche Hailey and Everall Peele; Eden Downtown Development Corporation – Tom Barbour and Rhonda Price; Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenways Commission – Ben Curtis; Planning Board – Jerry Holland; Strategic Planning Commission – Jim Burnette; and Tree Board – Paul Dishmon and Max Kirks.

MEETING CONVENED:

Mayor Hall greeted the attendees and called the meeting to order. He said it was important for each board to come together in order to understand what each was responsible for in an effort to work together. He expressed his appreciation to all of the members for volunteering their time to serve on the boards. Following a blessing by Council Member Epps, attendees took a break to eat dinner.

OVERVIEW OF COODINATION GOALS:

Mayor Hall called on City Manager Jon Mendenhall.

Mr. Mendenhall said the purpose of the meeting was to discuss coordination and collaboration across the different boards, committees and commissions for the betterment of the citizens of Eden. He summarized a section from the FY 2021-22 Budget Message in regards to the allocation program for advisory boards, committees and commissions. All previous allocations to advisory boards, committees and commissions, with the exemption of the Strategic Planning Commission, had been withdrawn from the budget and moved to Contingency Funds in order that as a group, representatives of each could meet, coordinate their work and present a work plan with an accompanying funding request for consideration whereupon contingency funds could be allocated as the Council deemed appropriate. The budget allotted for the change in order to allow more coordination and cooperation, in addition to permitting for the City's financials to become prepared for an environment that might be inflationary in nature. The City would not be financing anything but would

instead be moving to a pay-as-you-go format in order to eliminate an increase in the City's debt service moving forward, which would help to prepare the City for a future that could be different than the present. It would enable the City to realize what opportunities may come about in the future while also mitigating any risks so that the tax rate and services could remain the same, if not improved. In the upcoming budget, the tax rate would remain the same, there would be no water or sewer rate increase, and the large water and sewer rate increase that had been previously discussed for a number of years had been removed from consideration. The City would have to be conservative on all allocations and costs. It was important to coordinate work so there would be no needless duplications and efficiency could be achieved.

OVERVIEW OF BUDGET SITUATION:

Mayor Hall called on Director of Finance and Personnel Tammie McMichael.

Ms. McMichael noted that balancing the City's budget became more challenging each year due to limited revenues and increases in operational expenses and capital needs. When the FY 2021-22 budget process began, there was a shortfall of \$1,778,900 in the General Fund and a \$2,168,000 shortfall in the Water and Sewer Fund. For several years, the City had to use Fund Balance in order to balance the City's operating budget. The City had also added a lot of debt to help leverage its money in order to pay for some capital outlay items, which was not a good process to continue. The pay-go scale would help to pay off some of the City's debt in an effort to be in a better financial standing. Mr. Mendenhall met with all of the department heads and necessary budget cuts were made to establish a balanced budget for the upcoming fiscal year, which continued to meet the City's basic needs and critical areas while also addressing some of the City's various capital improvement needs. However, it did not provide all of funds necessary for all of the capital requests. The total budget for FY 2021-22 was \$25,289,200: \$16,598,300 in the General Fund, of which the primary source of revenue was property taxes; and \$10,253,700 in the Water and Sewer Fund, of which the primary source of revenue was charges for water and sewer services. The budget did include the \$1.00 solid waste fee increase due to Rockingham County Landfill's tipping fee increase for the disposal of solid waste. The budget addressed the advisory boards, committees and commissions by stating each group would present a work plan with an itemized funding request to the City Council and once the plan had been approved, it would be funded using General Fund Contingency. If it were to be an operational request, it might be sent back to the actual department. City staff felt the budget was a financial blueprint that would help the City continue to work diligently to improve the long-term financial condition of the City and maintain the basic level of services to its citizens.

Mayor Hall thanked Ms. McMichael and the remainder of the Finance Department for working diligently with Mr. Mendenhall to finalize the budget.

GROUP DISCUSSION:

Mayor Hall called on Director of Planning and Community Development Kelly Stultz.

Ms. Stultz said she had staffed the Planning Board, Board of Adjustment, Community Appearance Commission, Tree Board and the Historic Preservation Commission throughout her career with the City. Effective July 1, Marketing and Special Events Manager Cindy Adams would replace Ms. Stultz's seat on the Strategic Planning Commission. Interim Parks and Recreation Director Terry Vernon also staffed a couple of boards. In the past, groups had planned projects during the budget process and then asked for funding. Mr. Mendenhall was now asking for a work plan so the City could plan for what quarter the projects would take place in and how it would affect staff. The Historic Preservation Commission was often interested in historic markers, repairing signs and landmark designations in which funds were needed. The Community Appearance Commission worked on projects that were fundraisers in the past and were given funds for banners on Highway 14 and the downtown areas. The commission also had some regulatory authority but in

order to see the things happen for the benefit of the community, all members of the boards are asked to address specific tasks pertaining to the board they serve on. In the past, the Planning Board only allocated money for travel expenses related to conferences. Going forward, their work plan would focus on the small area plans for the community. The work plans gave members goals to work towards. The Council had always been in favor of funding as much good work of the boards and commissions that the City could afford. She hoped all members would embrace the work plan process in an effort to make the community better. There was also an overlap between the boards where multiple groups may work on joint projects to accomplish common goals. The special meeting's goal was to allow time for all members to become acquainted with each other and to understand what each group did so that Eden could be improved.

Blanche Hailey, chair of the Historic Preservation Commission and Everall Peele, vice chair, were in attendance. Ms. Hailey said the commission was working on some ongoing projects, such as requests for landmarks. There was an old mural on the walkway next to the coffee shop that was painted by an artist who happened to be the guitar player in Charlie Poole's band. The mural was something the commission was working on having declared as a historic preservation site so it could be preserved. The commission's long-term plan was to have historic districts. The commission hoped to obtain funding from the state for a marker for the Draper Speedway, in which they were also hoping to secure help from North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT). There had also been some interest that NASCAR would possibly assist with that project.

Rhonda Price, member of Eden Downtown Development Incorporation, was present to represent Uptown Eden and their efforts to build and grow the area.

Julie Talbert, chair of the Community Appearance Commission and Debbie Ellis, vice chair, were in attendance. Ms. Talbert said the commission was beginning to formulate a plan with some concrete activities for the beautification of Eden and innovative ideas that would be low cost. The commission was trying to maximize the opportunities they had with the limited funds that were available. The main focus was to make sure each of the City's areas were showcased in a unique way so that the flavor, history and character of each of the areas shined. The members wanted to present Eden in the best light possible.

Max Kirks, chairman of the Tree Board, thanked Paul Dishmon for being a great addition to the board. He also thanked Planner Debbie Galloway, noting she had helped the board in a tremendous way. The board's two goals were community service and education. Eden was designated as a Tree City USA, which included the celebration of Arbor Day. The board was known to visit the elementary schools, in which they would make a presentation to the fourth graders and would give seedlings to the students to take home and plant. Pride in the community was the goal of all members. The trees on Van Buren Road and Highway 14 were plum trees that had almost reached the end of their lifetime, which was typically 16 to 20 years; therefore, they would soon need to be replaced. At the board's last meeting, the members discussed the needed efforts to reiterate goals that the members wanted to continue with and the new way funding would be dispersed in order to assist them with working on next year's goals. The board's goals sometimes veered away from the Tree Board's responsibility slightly, but they had discussed partnering with the library and their book walk that would extend to Freedom Park. The project would include podiums that would be placed along the nature trail with one page of a book at each podium until the last podium was reached that would include the last page of the book, along with copies of the book. It would give people a new way of enjoying the park and while it did not correlate to the planting of trees, it involved the enjoyment of that type of environment. The members also looked at partnering with the Community Appearance Commission on a botanical garden. All of the members needed to contribute to ideas. While they understood the reasons for why the City has had to cut some of its trees down in the past, their philosophy was to plant trees instead of cutting them down; therefore, the board wanted to make a commitment that for every tree taken down, one would be planted in its place. He thanked Council because he could not recall a single incident where the board requested funds that were not approved.

Will Flynt, chair of the Board of Adjustment, stated that the board heard appeals from the Planning Board. The board did not meet often, noting they had only met once during the past year. The board should not need money from the City's budget.

Ms. Stultz said the Board of Adjustment was the hardest board to serve on because it heard appeals from decisions that the zoning officer had made. They also dealt with variance requests from property owners who believed their property had a circumstance on it that kept them from having the same privileges that other property owners had.

Jerry Holland, vice chair of the Planning Board, said the overall foresight of the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) was to unify Rockingham County as a whole. There was no intent to remove a zoning classification to hurt any established business or residence. The members worked for the citizens of the City for free as they were all volunteers. The board revisited their decision regarding the UDO and there would be more decisions made in the near future. The board had the best intentions of the City and its residents at heart. He had enjoyed serving on the board for the past 12 years and had learned that the citizens of Eden were friendly based on how many times his real estate clients had told him such.

Ms. Stultz said the Planning Board served by state law as the lead planning agency for the entire city. They were also the steering committee for the comprehensive plan that was required by law to be completed by July 1, 2022. They had also served as the steering committee for the Pedestrian Plan, which would be completed by the end of July. The group had willingly met several times and worked hard as an advisory group.

Jim Burnette, chair of the Strategic Planning Commission, thanked Ms. Stultz for everything she had done for the board and told Ms. Adams he looked forward to working with her in the future. Over five years ago, Council approved to endorse a strategic plan, which gave the City certain strategy areas in which to evaluate and work on. There were five areas the commission worked with: (1) economic vitality; (2) downtown redevelopment; (3) engagement of citizens; (4) health; and (5) recreation. A lot of the City's committees fell within those five areas; therefore, working together was a good thing. The commission was looking at their strategies and ideas for the upcoming year. They had some things they would be presenting in the fall to Council.

Erin Gilley, staff sponsor for the Eden Youth Council, stated the group was started eight years ago by City Council in an effort to encourage and involve the youth in City decisions being made. There were youth who were growing up, leaving town and not coming back, but the thought was that if they were involved and had some decision-making power while they were living here, they might stay in Eden and if not, they would gain some leadership skills they could use in their future. The members had been able to steer the group in the way they wanted by choosing their projects with the guidance and help of staff advisors. It had become a service project organization in which they had raised money for Camp Carefree and the elementary schools by organizing 5K runs and kickball tournaments. They had also raked leaves for the elderly and volunteered for the Salvation Army. It was made up of youth varying from ninth grade through age 20. There were also spots available for one or two eighth graders. There were 34 members who served on the council over the past school year, which was the largest number of participants thus far.

Council Member Ellis said the members could come from different high schools as long as they lived within the jurisdiction for Morehead High School.

Ben Curtis, chair of the Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Commission, said it was created because there was a need for changes and improvements to the current recreation facility in terms of how it was put together and structured in order to make it more effective for the City. He said that the commission was going to be ineffective if Council was not willing to spend money. He cited from the Greenway Master

Plan booklet: “the development of the Greenway Master Plan will be an undertaking for the City over the next 20 to 30 years.” Mr. Curtis stated the plan was printed in 2007, pointing out that 14 years had already passed and there were only three miles of greenway. The commission consisted of three subcommittees: (1) Facilities Subcommittee, which addressed what to do with the City’s buildings, including both current buildings and those no longer in use. The members looked at what the City was maintaining that it no longer needed to be maintaining and if there were any activities that could be created in order to utilize any unused facilities before getting rid of them; (2) Activities Subcommittee, which evaluated various activities the members wanted to include, would likely be a breakeven cost even though they would need money to get started. Mr. Curtis expressed his belief that if the City put forth a quality program, there should be a registration fee involved because the City had to have money in order to maintain quality programs; and (3) Greenway Subcommittee, which acknowledged they would not need to reinvent the wheel, but rather proceed with the Greenway Master Plan.

Council Member Ellis said in the past, everything in Eden was quality and it could be that way again. The greenway had been a positive asset for the City. There were some grants that had been used on the program. The City’s recreation program was not what it was in the past. While the City had never charged for its successful activities, it might be time for a change. Recreation would come back and the City would work towards making that happen.

Council Member Hunnicutt said the greenway involved more than just funding. He asked Mr. Curtis what the next specific targeted phase of greenway was.

Mr. Curtis said the Union Carbide Loop near the traffic circle that would extend upwards towards Nantucket Mill on the west side of the river, as was already outlined in the Greenway Master Plan. Ms. Stultz was going to obtain a cost estimate that would be discussed at the commission’s August meeting with the hopes of being able to make a recommendation to Mr. Mendenhall for the August City Council meeting.

Council Member Hunnicutt said the City had to have targets in order to know how to fund the phases as they could not just hand money out and say they would figure it out.

Mr. Curtis said the Greenway Master Plan started in 2007 and asked why it stopped.

Ms. Stultz said Council spent \$136,000 the first year for the Greenway Master Plan and then roughly the same amount to have the plans drawn for the Smith River Greenway. By the time it was all done, it was almost \$1 million. Staff was told by NCDOT that the City had to build a greenway before it would be eligible for any transportation enhancement funds. NCDOT had not had a funding cycle for such since then; therefore, the City had been looking for grant funds and other ways to build greenways. Director of Economic Development Mike Dougherty was able to secure some funding from Duke Energy, which was how Matrimony Creek came to be. She added that it was not a situation where people had turned their backs on the Greenway Master Plan, but rather \$1 million at that time was over a penny on the tax rate. And while it was not far from that at the present time, Council had a lot of departments requesting various things that they were required to balance. For example, Council had been overwhelmed with the Administrative Order, but there may be more grant funding moving forward.

Ms. Talbert, also executive director of the Eden Boys and Girls Club, said the club was more than willing to collaborate and partner with the commission in an effort to make sure sports were offered to all kids and that the sports programs across the City were robust. It had been the club’s core mission to provide kids with the opportunities to experience such things. There were a lot of teams that were playing various sports and it was in their best interest to have good teams to play with. The club had been awarded a Kate B. Reynolds Grant for the past two years. The concept of the grant was for the club to be a community hub, not just for

kids, but for families as well, particularly those that were underserved or vulnerable. It was an extension of sports to help families as well.

Mayor Hall said the point of the Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Commission was for the group to come before Council as a group to request funding in order to make the City's parks and recreation better. The City could not afford to do everything but all agreed that recreation was important to the community and they would consider what the commission suggested.

COUNCIL COMMENTS:

Council Member Carter thanked everyone in attendance and for doing a great job. Mr. Mendenhall had said the new format would give the boards and commissions a chance to present to Council what they needed as that was something they did not necessarily hear from every group in the past. There had not been many worthwhile things that Council had turned down, especially when it came to dealing with the youth. He pointed out another aspect that was good for the taxpayers was that the City would be paying down its debt instead of increasing it. He thanked Mr. Mendenhall for his comments and the other Council members for their time.

Council Member Nooe said he appreciated everyone's service, adding that sometimes it was a thankless job but it was also a rewarding job. He stated it was nice to see everyone present and he encouraged them to talk to Council one-on-one if necessary if there was something they needed or wanted. Council wanted to work with the boards and commissions to make Eden a better place.

Council Member Ellis thanked Mr. Burnette for being in attendance and for the wisdom he had given to him. He wanted for the committees and boards to be united as one in the same way Leaksville, Spray and Draper consolidated to become one. He thanked the members for serving. It was positive that the City was continuing to grow with Mr. Mendenhall as its leader, noting that he accepted a lot of challenges from the Council and was doing a great job for them.

Council Member Hunnicutt said he appreciated everyone who was serving. He asked Ms. Stultz about membership and stated that by ordinance Council was to appoint members from their wards for some of the committees, while some committees came up with their own recommendations that they brought before Council for approval. Rather than City Council appoint people for some of the boards, committees or commissions, he felt it might be best for some groups to establish their own members so they knew who they were working with. As the groups started to interact, he would like feedback from the members in regards to if they felt they would be more productive if they could choose their own members.

Ms. Stultz said it had been tradition for the Historic Preservation Commission, the Community Appearance Commission and the Tree Board to suggest potential members to Council when there was a vacancy that needed to be filled. Finding people with a special interest to serve on the boards was difficult and therefore, would be good to encourage the existing members to pass along their recommendations to Council. She felt the members' work was more easily recognized if they were appointed by the Council.

Council Member Hunnicutt asked Mr. Mendenhall who set the common goals that the groups were supposed to work on and what were the strategic targets. He was uncertain of the mechanics as to how it was to be accomplished. Input from the group and Council was important, but there needed to be a methodology established to lay out common goals or challenges that were sent to the groups. For example, in relation to Uptown Eden, he could see where the Historic Preservation Commission and the Strategic Planning Commission could work together on the small area plan. He asked the Historic Preservation Commission members who were present if they were the group that funded the brass plaques that went over some of the area's locations.

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Ms. Stultz asked if he was referring to the National Register plates because the City had paid for those in the past, but in order to get a national register nomination, there were fees involved that the property owner had to pay. For local landmarks and districts, those were handled by the Historic Preservation Commission and City staff.

Council Member Hunnicutt said he did not believe they were plaques related to the national register as the ones he saw stated 'Old Smith Building' and 'Jones Hardware' on them.

Ms. Adams said those were done in conjunction with the Historic Preservation Commission and the City's Tourism Department.

Council Member Hunnicutt said he would love to see more of those done as it was a small recognition for anyone who invested in their property. His last question was directed towards Mr. Mendenhall, in which he asked what the next step would be.

Council Member Moore thanked Mr. Mendenhall for organizing the special meeting. He felt it was good to inform the groups of what each other did. He thanked the new Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Commission, acknowledging the group had a big task in front of them. He instructed everyone present to let Council know what they needed and the Council would do what they could. He thanked everyone for serving on the boards and committees.

Council Member Epps said he received an education at the meeting. He was always learning something new and was glad to see that everyone was in tune with the thought of communicating and working together as a family. He always listened but he was only one vote and did what he could with his vote. He stated that Council appreciated all of the volunteers and their efforts and work. Council was available to discuss any problems or disagreements.

Mr. Curtis said the Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Commission sent Mr. Mendenhall an email regarding their request.

Mayor Hall thanked all staff members present. He especially thanked Ms. Stultz and Mr. Vernon for their leadership on the committees and boards. In response to Council Member Hunnicutt's suggestion regarding the appointment of members, he encouraged adding more minorities to the boards. He was glad the meeting allowed interaction and knowledge about what each board, committee and commission was responsible for. All of the groups had a different set of goals and issues that they were working with but everyone serving on the boards did it because they loved living in Eden.

Mr. Burnette recalled it being said that if certain things arose that were deemed operational, those would be sent back to the appropriate department. He asked for a definition of what was considered operational so they would know how to approach such things.

Mayor Hall said a lot of things were sent to the Strategic Planning Commission in the past that should have been considered operational. Therefore, the intent behind Mr. Mendenhall's statement was to keep the Strategic Planning Commission headed in the direction of strategic planning and not funding something that should have been funded from somewhere else.

Ms. Adams said trails were not as easy as they sounded. She began working for the City in 2008 and had discovered that it all depended on leadership and their focus. For many years after the Smith River Greenway was established, trails and greenways were not a focus, but often with new leadership came a change in focus. The City presently had a rivers and trails group. Easements were also a big issue in regards to trails because the City would not be able to move forward if there was even one property owner who was not in

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favor of a needed easement. Maintenance was also a factor as it was difficult to keep up with what the City currently had, and now they had the additions of Clearwater Park, Dan River Nature Trail and the river access points. If the City did not maintain what it had, no one would come or utilize the trails. Even with grants, there were lots of issues that came along with trails.

Council Member Moore said they would rather have quality than quantity.

Ms. Peele said she found the meeting to be educational but reiterated what Council Member Hunnicutt said and asked what could be expected next.

Mayor Hall said the special meeting was an introductory meeting and hopefully communication between the boards that worked closely together would continue and it would be easier to find out who to contact. He stated that he was not opposed to the groups meeting more regularly. Because several of the boards did not know what the others did, Mr. Mendenhall had suggested everyone come together to meet.

Mr. Holland said it appeared that everyone felt it had been a good meeting and he suggested planning additional meetings, possibly quarterly or semi-annually.

Mayor Hall said that Council would look into it and research how long was needed between the present meeting and the next one. Some boards would be much busier than others and suggested possibly extending it to additional board members as well.

Council Member Hunnicutt agreed. He felt that once or twice a year would be adequate but he did not think it needed to be a Council meeting. He said the groups could certainly use the Eden Room to meet, but they also needed to involve some public input as that always had the potential to bring some good ideas.

Ms. Price thanked Mr. Dishmon for sending the departments to Uptown Eden to clean the sidewalks and maintain the area.

Mr. Dishmon said the nationwide permit was received for Matrimony Creek and the work had been started. He stated that Mr. Dougherty obtained an additional \$15,000 Duke Energy grant that assisted with the project.

ADJOURNMENT:

As there was no further business to discuss, a motion was made by unanimous consent to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,

Deanna Hunt
City Clerk

ATTEST:

Neville Hall
Mayor