

CITY OF EDEN, N.C.

A special meeting - Draper Community - of the City Council, City of Eden, was held on Thursday, July 22, 2021 at 6 p.m. at Draper Christian Church, 1122 W. Fieldcrest Road. Those present for the meeting were as follows:

Mayor:	Neville Hall
Council Members:	Darryl Carter
	Gerald Ellis
	Jerry Epps
	Angela Hampton
	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; Tammy Amos, Director of Transportation Engineering; Paul Dishmon, Interim Director of Public Works; Randy Hunt, Community & Economic Development Specialist; Todd Harden, Interim Fire Chief; Debra Madison, GIS Analyst; Tammie McMichael, Director of Finance & Personnel; Clint Simpson, Police Chief/Assistant City Manager; Kelly Stultz, Director of Planning & Community Development; and Ray Thomas, Superintendent of Facilities & Grounds.

MEETING CONVENED:

Community & Economic Development Specialist Randy Hunt welcomed attendees to the meeting designed to address small area plans that recognized the opportunities for Draper to grow and thrive. He thanked the church for the use of the facility and explained there were boxes available for attendees to submit questions, ideas and comments. He highlighted some things happening in Eden: beginning in spring 2019 and throughout 2020, Eden had unprecedented economic development success including Gildan Yarns' \$4.5 million investment/75 new jobs; Night Owl's \$3 million/60 new jobs; EVBP \$1 million/18 new jobs; and Nestle-Purina's future \$600 million/350 new jobs. Most of the investment was within two minutes of the church. The Southern Virginia Mega Park at Berry Hill was the number one mega site in the region and Caesar's Casino would be opening in Pittsylvania County, creating 1,300 jobs. Draper downtown was the closest commercial location to the park. The housing market was exploding. Draper was on the cusp of something big and now was the best chance to plan for its future. Council and staff were in attendance to see what the City could do to support local development.

Mayor Hall thanked the church for the use of the facility and staff for putting the meeting together. There had been a lot of momentum in the Leaksville area and The Boulevard was starting to do well. The City needed to know what they could do to help Draper progress. He thanked everyone for coming, it meant a lot when people got involved

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS:

Mr. Hunt read from the comment cards and addressed questions from the audience:

Minutes of the July 22, 2021 special meeting of the City Council, City of Eden:

- What are the plans for Draper school? Would the citizens be able to voice their concerns about what went in it?

Mr. Hunt advised the building was owned by Rockingham County Schools. As soon as the City was able to share any plans the school system had for the building, they would. He thought the school system would want community input. Some things were out of the City's control but the City wanted the right fit for the community as well.

- What would the town like to see at 101 and 105 S. Fieldcrest?

Mr. Hunt gave his email address and ask the attendees to let him know if they had ideas of what should be there.

- More meetings with merchants.

Mr. Hunt advised meeting had been difficult since the pandemic. There should be more meetings going forward since restrictions were lifted. The City did need input to develop a good, cohesive plan. Nestle-Purina had 188 vendors who would be in Eden to help them with their process. Now was the time for Draper to move forward. Draper was the economic powerhouse before consolidation. A lot of industry left and Draper was the most heavily affected. Investment was coming and Draper needed to be prepared for it.

- Currently, downtown Draper looked like three different sections: Stadium Drive to Ridge Avenue, Ridge Avenue to Mill Avenue and Mill Avenue to Meadow Road. Any plans to make it look like one downtown?

Mr. Hunt advised the city manager had taken the lead on that. He had instructed Mr. Hunt to make sure signage and branding was consistent. It was taking some time as they had run into material shortages and issues with signs on Duke Energy poles. He had not thought about the area that way but now that it was pointed out, it was something they could work on.

- Concern about gravel lot beside Jerry's Restaurant.

Mr. Hunt advised he had worked on the lot for probably a year and a half. Draper no longer had a bank or pharmacy, two things that anchored areas. Banks were closing all over the country as banking operations were moving online. The State Employees' Credit Union had signed leases last month for two areas in Eden to get ATMs. Building permits were issued earlier in the week for a drive-through ATM in the gravel lot and a walk-up ATM in Leaksville. That ATM would likely clean up the area.

- Clean up drug problem, need restaurants.

Mr. Hunt advised Railroad Café did a great job. Jerry's Restaurant had difficulty reopening. A Mexican restaurant would open in the former Tee's Pizza on Fieldcrest Road. The area did need more choices and they would continue to be recruited. It was expensive to retrofit old buildings for restaurants and they wanted to preserve the historic buildings. It was a good time to open a restaurant in the area.

Police Chief/Assistant City Manager Clint Simpson advised nationwide there was an opioid epidemic. Eden was currently far better off than it had been at times. They were continuing to make progress but it was a never-ending battle. There were two components: enforcement and getting people help. Eden never let up on enforcement, even during the pandemic. In the next few weeks, Eden would be part of the PORT (Post Overdose Response Team) program which had been successful in Reidsville. Mental health service providers

and law enforcement partnered to get users off of drugs. They needed community effort, if residents saw something they should let the department know as officers could not be everywhere. On the enforcement side, the department was targeting dealers.

- When is the hole in the building going to be fixed?

Mr. Hunt had talked to the property owner several times and suggested that building rehab grants may be available to help with that process. Some code enforcement had been eased during the pandemic but it was coming back. There was also a vacant commercial property listing which required that downtown buildings look like viable businesses. If there was not a tenant in a downtown building, it needed to be registered with the department. The intent was to make the buildings aesthetically pleasing. He would be back in touch with that property owner.

- Adding a boat access to Draper Landing.

Mr. Hunt advised a grant had been received from the Duke Energy Water Resources Fund to repair the landing when it had washed out as well as put a new one in at Klyce Street. The City owned the Klyce Street property and leased the Draper Landing property. It would be a great place for an access if they had extra money.

Council Member Ellis agreed. He would like if they could find some money to put in the access.

- What does Mr. Hunt do?

Mr. Hunt introduced himself and advised that he had lived in the area since 1993. In addition to other duties, he managed the Main Street program and Eden was one of two cities in the state that had two downtowns in the program, Draper and Leaksville.

- Restore the old theater.

Mr. Hunt liked that idea. The building had historical significance and was an icon. It was privately owned. They had those conversations with the property owner and would continue to do that.

- Art, art and more art.

Mr. Hunt said he was a proponent of public art. A new property owner in Draper had contacted him and said he wanted a mural on the side of one of his buildings. He noted that artist RaShaun Wilson was in attendance and said Mr. Wilson had an art studio in the middle of downtown. Mr. Wilson had been commissioned to do a quilt square for the Rockingham County Fine Arts Association and more importantly, had been commissioned by the Rockingham County Arts Council to do a mural that would go on the front of his building. It was progressing and looked great.

Mr. Wilson said the mural was based on things close to his heart. It was a beautiful painting and he hoped to have a grand opening for it in the spring.

- How many development grants are available for businesses and homes to use to upgrade the facades of businesses and housing in Draper? How much and how can we get information?

Mr. Hunt advised he was the contact person. There were façade grants available in the MSD (Municipal Service District) with funding set aside by City Council. He explained that the MSD was an area whose

Minutes of the July 22, 2021 special meeting of the City Council, City of Eden:

owners agreed to tax themselves above the normal property tax rate. The MSD then used those funds for things such as Christmas lights. Façade grants were available up to \$500 at a two-to-one match. The building rehab grant was made initially with the idea of converting some downtown buildings into restaurants. It was up to \$5,000. The Community Development Block Grant that was applied to some of the homes in the area had been put out for bid and that work should start soon.

Council Member Hunnicutt noted that the high demand for façade grants the last year had caused Council to replenish the funds midyear.

Mr. Hunt agreed. The buildings that received those grants looked good. The City wanted to be good stewards of the people's money.

- Can we get the neighbors in Draper not to have all this junk sitting on porches? This makes our city look like a dump. Eden was a beautiful place when I grew up. I was raised in Virginia but always loved coming to Eden. Things have changed. Let's get Draper cleaned.

Mr. Hunt agreed. There was a process in place for junk and high grass but it needed to be reported to the City before the process could start. It could be timely and it cost taxpayer money when people were not mowing their yards.

Council Member Ellis said they were looking in the future. Seeing rail coming back to Eden was important. He would like to see a rendering of what the area from the plants back through the Draper community could look like going forward and being cleaned out to some extent. The depot was a treasure and he would like to see it restored and repurposed. Many owners were holding onto their buildings and it was their property, but he would like the City to work with them and they were trying to. They needed to imagine what could be, not what had been. The future could be great for Draper.

Council Member Hunnicutt agreed with the potential for Purina, the mega park and the casino. He thought they were overlooking that a lot of what they needed was already here. The entire industrial base in Eden was pretty much east of Edgewood Road. There were hundreds of people 30 seconds away in the industrial park, on New Street and at Gildan. There was a lot of potential he did not feel they were taking advantage of. The City wanted to come to the community to let them know the City wanted to help. There was only so much the City could do. If there were code issues, they could get involved but it really came down to individual owners taking the initiative to clean up their buildings and make them available. He heard people were looking for buildings in Draper but were being told they were for storage and not available. He knew Council and staff wanted to help and do whatever they could but it should be partnership where people started making properties available and cleaning up. There was a huge amount of potential right now and even more coming.

Attendee Jennifer Boyte said the area had a lot of history. She wanted the community to come together and save the things they already had. There were many rental homes and she questioned why the owners allowed tenants to let their grass get high and to put furniture on the porch. Everyone needed to take responsibility to make it right.

Council Member Hunnicutt said in areas that were successful, one of the things that helped was to draw people to those locations, noting that Shaggin' on Fieldcrest would take place this weekend. He cited an event - Burgers and Bluegrass - he heard about in a small town. It cost the town nothing but drew hundreds. People had to come to get excited about an area.

Minutes of the July 22, 2021 special meeting of the City Council, City of Eden:

Ms. Boyte said if one person would take care of their property, the next person would want to take care of theirs. She asked what the City planned to do with the comments they had heard. She wanted to know if a plan would be made and where it would start.

Mr. Hunt advised this was a first in a series of meetings. He believed they needed to come where people were to get information. They intended to take the ideas and work through them. A lot of the things would not be solved overnight. They wanted this to be the beginning of the small area plan. He noted there were pedestrian plan surveys people could fill out to let the City know what they wanted, such as where they wanted sidewalks.

District Attorney Jason Ramey thanked the City for holding the meeting. Some of his fondest memories were at his grandmother's house on Ford Street, spending time at the Draper Recreation Center and the Draper Pool. Draper had a stigma attached to it that was unearned, it had no more crime than the rest of Eden and in fact he thought it was the area of town police had to respond the least to. The stigma had persisted throughout his life and he did not know why.

Council Member Hampton advised that she had just visited the state of Washington and saw how a small town had repurposed rail, using old trains to assist the homeless. She was a firm believer that doing something with the railroad was a good idea. The area had a lot of things and they needed to use those. They had a depot. She suggested raising funds and having an engine for train rides. She was a Draper girl and she loved it.

GIS Analyst Debra Madison reported that pedestrian plan surveys needed to be turned in by July 30. On Thursday, Aug. 19, there would be a public meeting at City Hall for the draft of the plan that would include all the survey data.

Planning & Community Development Director Kelly Stultz said the surveys could be submitted online or dropped off at City Hall.

Mr. Hunt agreed and noted the City's new website went live that day.

- What is the current zoning change, why make the change and who requested the change?

Mr. Hunt said the state mandated every municipality to unify their ordinances, creating a UDO (Unified Development Ordinance). The City's existing zoning had never been done that way. The City got in front of it before most other communities and hired specialists to help organize it. The people had spoken about some zoning changes they were unhappy with it and at Tuesday's night's meeting, some of the zoning had been changed back. There may be more properties that needed addressing. People were welcome to come to City Hall and have it taken care of at no charge.

Attendee Houston Barrow noted the county was also in the process of updating their UDO. A public hearing was continued for Aug. 16 for people who may be interested. Information could be found on the county's website.

City Manager Jon Mendenhall introduced himself and explained the intent of the meeting. They had great economic news. They were aware they needed broader community investment in their neighborhoods and downtown areas. It was not a competition between downtowns, each had its own strong points. Council had authorized small area plans. It may sound like the City was going to create a document and put it on the shelf as had been done often in the past but the small area plan was different. It was a cooperative effort. A consultant would come in and there would be a design, maps, meetings, some input about what the community would like to see and where. Those would be a continuation of this meeting. There was a concept

Minutes of the July 22, 2021 special meeting of the City Council, City of Eden:

called continuous improvement, which was to take one step and plan the next, continuously moving forward into the future. They were taking that concept and bringing it local with the small area plans. This was the beginning of the conversation. He encouraged everyone with their ideas. This was not City-initiated, they were only as strong as the community. The City was not a stand-alone entity. They were the representatives of the people. Draper was a great place and that stigma needed to be removed. They did not want to focus on the negatives of the past and together he thought they could do that.

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