

**SUMMARY MINUTES OF A WORK SESSION
OF THE CHAPEL HILL TOWN COUNCIL
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2003 AT 5:00 P.M.**

Mayor Foy called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Council members present were Pat Evans, Bill Strom, Dorothy Verkerk, Jim Ward, and Edith Wiggins.

Council Member Mark Kleinschmidt was absent, excused.

Council Member Ed Harrison arrived at 5:10 p.m.

Council Member Flicka Bateman arrived at 5:14 p.m.

Also present were Council Members-elect Sally Greene and Cam Hill.

Staff members present were Town Manager Cal Horton, Assistant Town Managers Sonna Loewenthal and Florentine Miller, Town Attorney Ralph Karpinos, Engineering Director George Small, Traffic Engineer Kumar Neppalli, Planning Director Roger Waldon, Senior Planner Phil Hervey, Senior Long Range Planning Coordinator Chris Berndt, and Town Clerk Joyce Smith.

**Item 1 - Work Session on Suggested Policy and Procedures
for Traffic Calming Measures**

Mr. Horton explained that the Council had traditionally considered traffic calming proposals on an ad hoc basis. There was a fairly long list of current requests, he said, so the Council might want to consider a more formal way of evaluating them and establishing priorities. Mr. Horton said that Engineering Director George Small and Traffic Engineer Kumar Neppalli had developed options for the Council's consideration. Mr. Small summarized the following three options:

- *Continue with the existing process.* This would mean continuing to consider requests on a first come/first served basis.
- *Establish a formal policy and procedure for traffic calming.* This would mean accepting requests over the year and bringing them forward as part of the Council's budgeting process. It would not include assessing costs to property owners.
- *Assess traffic calming project costs to property owners.* This would be similar to the second option, except that costs would be assessed to properties that benefit.

Council Member Verkerk asked how much more time option two would take than option one. Mr. Small replied that it would take a little longer because the applications would be addressed only once a year. Under the current process, he said, the staff brings requests to the Council when they receive them. If someone were to come in right after the assessments then it could take almost a year, Mr. Small explained.

Council Member Ward inquired about the current timeframe between when a request comes in and when something actually gets changed on the ground. Mr. Small replied that the staff usually does about six weeks worth of front-end work, and then they bring the request to the Council. If the Council chooses to proceed, he continued, there is about more six weeks before construction starts. Council Member Ward asked if there was an option that falls between the current three-to-six month process and the 12-month process recommended in option two. He wondered about cutting the time in half so the process would be more responsive. Mr. Small replied that the Town could collect requests for less than a year. He noted, however, that this would create difficulties with regard to funding allocations. But it might be possible to allocate funds and spend some at the halfway point and the rest at the end of the year, he said.

Mr. Horton commented that the Council could consider projects twice a year, using the funds that were available. But the funds could be exhausted after the first pass through leaving none to assign after that, he pointed out.

Council Member-elect Sally Greene noted that neighborhoods that had been through the process before could have advantages over others who might feel quite daunted by it. She asked which cities the staff had looked at and whether those were using a two-thirds majority standard. Mr. Small replied that the staff had looked at Greensboro, Charlotte and Cary, which had ranged from a simple 51% majority to 75%. He explained that the staff had recommended more than a simple majority because that would make it less likely that objections would arise later on.

Mayor Foy noted that, under the current system, one citizen may bring in a request, which the Council receives and then initiates the process. Mr. Small pointed out, however, that the staff would not normally proceed on the basis of a request from only one person. Determining whether or not more neighbors agreed would be part of the initial work, he said.

Mayor Foy verified that there was only \$4,000 in the Town budget for traffic calming. He noted that bond money would not immediately be used for this purpose. Funds would have to be appropriated over the next several years out of general revenues, Mayor Foy explained.

Mayor pro tem Evans remarked that some traffic calming measures cost little or nothing. For example, allowing parking on the street slows cars down, she said. Mayor pro tem Evans also pointed out that better traffic signals could help prevent people from taking shortcuts. And adding bike lanes gives the impression of narrower roads, which tends to lower speed limits, she said.

Mayor pro tem Evans expressed an aversion to speed bumps, which force drivers to slow down to 15 mph. They are not sending the right message, which is to drive at the speed limit, she said. Mayor pro tem Evans said that posted speed limits were not realistic. She hoped that there would not be speed bumps in every neighborhood, she said, and she

suggested that neighbors talk among themselves about reducing speed in their neighborhoods.

Council Member Verkerk expressed reluctance to putting the Council in the position of choosing among a prioritized list of neighborhoods. Mayor Foy asked if she had an alternative approach, and Council Member Verkerk replied that she merely wanted to point out that the Council might find itself in the uncomfortable position of mediating between neighborhoods.

Council Member Strom inquired about the ramifications of option two for the Town Engineering Department. Mr. Small replied that it would depend on how many requests come in. There was a glut currently, he said, but added that the Department should be able to handle requests with existing staff if requests come in on a regular basis. Mr. Horton commented, though, that the Town was not handling all of the traffic engineering issues as well as it should be. He noted that Town Traffic Engineer Kumar Neppalli had to do technician work on occasion even though he was a highly skilled engineer.

Council Member Harrison suggested that the Council consider hiring a consultant. He noted that there were neighborhoods where traffic calming measures could not be installed and others where traffic was controlled through multi-way stop signs. Council Member Harrison asked about the possibility of having a staged approach, whereby the Town would systematically look at having stop signs on cross streets "and such." Mr. Small replied that the Town probably would continue receiving requests for stop signs, and for adding or removing on-street parking, separately from these traffic-calming measures. If a request came in from a neighborhood that would be satisfied with a set of stop signs, then the staff probably would not run it through the process but would just try it, he said.

Council Member Harrison verified that such requests were handled on the Council's Consent Agenda or Information Reports. He asked for Mr. Horton's opinion on hiring a consulting firm. Mr. Horton replied that the answer would depend somewhat on how much work the Council wanted the staff to get done all at once. If the Council wanted a lot of work done quickly then that would take resources which the staff does not have, Mr. Horton explained.

Council Member Ward expressed support for the second option. He stated that the Council's decisions had tended to be arbitrary and lacking in a broad understanding of budgetary implications. Council Member Ward recommended using 51% of the service area rather than 66%. The level of neighborhood support would be one way of ranking neighborhoods, he said, but suggested that 51% would be adequate for a neighborhood to be considered.

Mayor Foy ascertained that the Council could initiate traffic claming for any Town-maintained road regardless of the policy it adopts. Mr. Horton pointed out that the Council could amend its policy any way it saw fit, either systematically or on a case-by-case basis.

Mayor Foy asked Mr. Small to comment on Key Point 2 under Service Area, in Option 2, which Mr. Small had referred to as "challenging" for the staff. He asked Mr. Small to encapsulate the challenges and explain how it would differ from the current situation. Mr. Small explained that traffic calming could sometimes dramatically affect other streets in the area, such as cul de sacs that must use the main street to get in and out. He noted that the extent of the "service area" would be highly subjective and that reasonable people could disagree about it.

Council Member Strom commented that such things could be polarizing. He was comfortable with the way the Town was doing it now, he said, but was willing to discuss it further. Council Member Strom emphasized his view that the Town should require two-thirds on the petition process. The Council needs an indication of strong desire in the neighborhood before jumping into the process, he said. Council Member Strom asked that this be left open as a policy issue for the Council to discuss further. Mr. Small remarked that one problem is that it raises the question, "two-thirds of what?" Council Member Strom agreed, adding that the current system works in spite of its flaws.

Council Member Wiggins stated that some policy probably was necessary given the increased number of requests for traffic-calming structures. She suggested that the Council treat traffic calming requests in the same way they treat sidewalk requests. Collecting requests seemed fair, said Council Member Wiggins, noting that adding stop signs and controlling parking could be done as it has been, since that requires hardly any money. Council Member Wiggins suggested establishing a financial limit over which a traffic-calming request would go on a waiting list.

Council Member Bateman agreed with requiring a two-thirds majority because that would not polarize neighborhoods.

Mayor pro tem Evans added that many people sign petitions in order to be neighborly, but she agreed that requiring a larger percentage on petitions was important. Mayor pro tem Evans suggested that the police determine through surveillance whether or not there is a speeding problem. That might serve as a deterrent to speeding, she said.

Council Member Verkerk determined from Mr. Small that a neighborhood could languish on the priority list while others surpass it each year.

Council Member Ward pointed out the difficulty of establishing a service area. He wondered about capturing requests on a yearly basis and having the staff and Transportation Board evaluate the cost and number of people it would support and affect, and develop criteria for a priority list.

Council Member Wiggins suggested perhaps assigning points for how long a neighborhood has been on the priority list. That might keep the neighborhood from being bumped by others, she said.

BY A SHOW OF HANDS, COUNCIL MEMBERS STATED A PREFERENCE FOR OPTION #2 RATHER THAN OPTION #1. THE VOTE WAS 7-1, WITH COUNCIL MEMBER STROM OPPOSED. THERE WAS NO SUPPORT FOR PURSUING OPTION #3.

In response to Council Member-elect Greene's earlier comment about the task of contacting neighbors, Mr. Horton suggested that the staff might send out a survey so that all would have an opportunity to express their opinions without intimidation.

COUNCIL MEMBER WARD MOVED, SECONDED BY COUNCIL MEMBER STROM, TO REFER COUNCIL COMMENTS TO THE MANAGER AND TRANSPORTATION BOARD. THE MOTION WAS ADOPTED UNANIMOUSLY (8-0).