

MINUTES
LOUISBURG TOWN COUNCIL
May 2, 2022

The Town Council met on Monday, May 2, 2022 at 7:30 PM at the Town's Operations Center. Mayor Christopher Neal and Council Members Betty Wright, Emma Stewart, Bobby Dickerson, Mark Russell, Tom Clancy and Silke Stein were present. Mayor Christopher Neal welcomed everyone and opened the Special Called Town Council meeting.

Following the roll call, Ms. Linda Keith gave the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Louisburg Mayor Christopher Neal led the citizens of Louisburg in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States.

DISCUSSION OF DEPOT HILL

Mayor Neal opened the discussion by introducing the contractors of the Depot Hill Project, Mr. Keith Smith and Mr. Glenn Swanson of S&S Enterprises. Mr. Smith began by distributing a 1 page "cheat sheet" briefly outlining the project cost estimates to the Council Members. He stated that the budget is outside of their responsibility; they actually joined the project about a year after it began. He stated that \$43,612 would get the project to a point where it would stop additional damage; it will not be considered "dried in". A few minutes later Council Member Russell asked for clarification on the costs involved to get to this protected stage because the figures shown did not equal this amount. After reviewing the costs, Mr. Smith corrected his figure to \$57,472.

Mayor Neal reminded the Council that funds must be spent according to specified allocations. For example, \$700,000 given by Matthew Winslow was specified to be used for a Civic Center and \$750,000 in federal funds secured by Congressman David Price must be used on the Depot Hill Project, but the town has some discretion for the specific use of the funds. He also advised that if the funds are not used according to the specified use, the funds will need to be returned to the source and this could put future funding in jeopardy.

Council Member Dickerson expressed concern over unexpected problems earlier in the project. He asked Mr. Smith to elaborate on those problems. Mr. Smith responded that under the concrete floor there was approximately five feet of air, which appeared to be an old well, and to correct this problem they brought in gravel. Council Member Dickerson asked if an Environmental Study had been conducted. Mr. Swanson replied that no study was necessary for this project. The second problem that was found was that the back wall had a Cottonwood tree growing out of it. To correct this, the back wall had to be torn down and reconstructed.

Council Member Stein expressed that she wants the Depot Hill project to succeed; however, she is concerned about the purpose of the use. She questioned what if council decides not to use this as an event venue. Town Finance Director Sean Medlin stated that \$125,000 from the Tobacco Trust Fund was specified for a commissary/commercial kitchen, and if not used for this purpose, it would need to be returned.

Council Member Clancy expressed his concern over running out of money and what would happen to the project. Mayor Neal advised that there is enough funding for the two large areas marked "A" and "B" on the floorplan distributed to the council and this would complete the initial phase. Council Member Clancy asked if it would be beneficial to have developers come in and discuss options for the other areas. Mr. Smith clarified that of the \$57,472 needed to bring this project to a "paused" state, all but \$14,000 is already committed in contracts. Council Member Stewart stated that the council needs to show their commitment to the completion of this project. Mayor Neal agreed and said that if it seems that the town is dragging its feet, it could have a negative impact on the citizen's view of the current Town Council.

Council Member Dickerson asked if there was a site plan prepared for this project and Council Member Stein asked where people would park if we proceed with this project. Louisburg Planning Administrator Philip Slayter responded that there was no site plan. Mr. Smith said that former Town Administrator Jonathan Franklin did the best that he could with what he had to work with. Mr. Smith said there would normally have been a site plan prepared and he had also previously raised the question about parking.

Council Member Russell stated that he would like to hear comments from the public on the matter. There was some discussion as to whether or not public comments would be allowed at the Special Called meeting. Interim Town Administrator Jon Barlow advised that the comments would be limited to only what has been advertised for this meeting and Mayor Neal stated that the purpose of the meeting was a discussion on Depot Hill. Mayor Neal stated that he would allow public comment limited to one minute.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Linda Keith of 122 Grant Street stated that the project started several years ago and then ran into problems. The previous council agreed to move forward with Depot Hill, but it seems obvious to her that this council does not want to go forward.

Mr. Cory Thornton of 305 Spring Street stated that he had spoken with several council members who have stated they want this project to be a success and a contractor does not know how to proceed until the purpose of a building and, particularly before a site plan, is established.

Mr. Felix Allen of 408 North Main Street expressed his concern over no detailed site plan and no parking plan.

Ms. Christine Ende of 310 North Main Street said that all members have indicated that they want to go forward with this project, so she would ask that the council make a decision.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Council Member Clancy suggested another possible use for Depot Hill would be to make it into Town Hall.

Council Member Stewart would like for the project to go forward. She would suggest using the \$57,472 funds to get it to the stage that S&S Enterprises has recommended. She stated that they have experience in renovating local sites. She asked how much it would cost to take the project to the "dried-in" stage. Mr. Smith said he could not answer that because it

would depend on the types of doors and windows that would be needed and that would not be known until the purpose of the building was known.

Council Member Stein stated that she would like for this project to succeed and that her goal is for the entire town to benefit from the project. She said she is concerned that no study was done to show that a convention center was desired and that there is no site plan available for this project.

Mayor Neal asked to do what the funds are allocated for or we must send them back. He said we need to complete this project; we have the funds. All have agreed that we want to do it.

Council Member Stewart said there has been much discussion on social media and she has been involved with the council for many years. She would like to see the council move forward and stated that all have tried to deal with the project with integrity and hope that we can all pull together and see it to a safe point.

Council Member Wright stated that they should finish area A and B to finish what they started. Mr. Winslow wants a civic center. This would be free to the Town of Louisburg. Rental fees would be income to the town. Council Member stated she is ready for the council to do this.

Council Member Clancy made a motion to designate Depot Hill as a new Town Hall; seconded by Council Member Stein and a vote was taken by a show of hands. Those voting for the motion were Council Members Clancy, Stein, Russell; those voting against the motion were Council Members Dickerson, Stewart, Wright, and Mayor Neal.

Council Member Stewart made a motion to proceed with the Depot Hill project to the point of the contractor's recommendation as a good safe point with a cost of \$57, 472; seconded and motion passed with one opposed.

Council Member Stein made a motion to have a developer create a site plan for the best purposes of the money available. Town Planning Administrator Philip Slayter explained the process of such a proposal. Mayor Neal expressed a concern for where the funding would come from for this proposal. Interim Town Administrator Jon Barlow directed to the line item entitled "Contingency" and said that the funds could come from this line item. This motion was seconded by Council Member Clancy and a vote was taken by a show of hands. Those for the motion were Council Members Dickerson, Clancy, Russell, and Stein; those opposed were Council Members Wright and Stewart and Mayor Neal.

ADJOURNMENT

Council Member Stewart made a motion to adjourn with Council Member Wright giving a second. Motion passed without objection.

Submitted



Lori Rogers, Temporary Town Clerk