

2022 Downtown Plan Steering Committee



Meeting #8: Meeting Minutes

Thursday, June 9, 2022

Huntersville Town Hall, 6:00 – 8:00 PM

Attendees:

Voting Members Nate Bowman Gatewood Campbell
 Doug Ferguson Sean Flynn
 John Foster Charles Guinard
 Lee Hallman Janelle Harris
 Elaine Kerns Bob Lemon
 Sarah McAulay Cindy Trevisan*
 Jessika Tucker

Ex-Officio Members: April Dunn Kathy Jones
 Diane McLaine* John O'Neill
 Mike Russell* Stephen Swanick

Town Staff: Dave Hill Jack Simoneau
 Tracy Barron Jackie Huffman
 Bobby Williams

* Attended via Conference Call

- 1. Call to Order** – Chairperson McAulay called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. A recorded video of the meeting is available at: <https://www.facebook.com/HuntersvilleNCTownGovernment/videos/410250627487830>
- 2. Roll Call** – Meeting attendance is noted above.
- 3. Approval of Agenda** – Charles Guinard made the motion to approve; Janelle Harris seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.
- 4. Approval of Meeting Minutes from May 5, 2022** – Charles Guinard made the motion to approve the meeting minutes, with a correction noting that Elizabeth Rodriguez attended the May 5th meeting via conference call; Doug Ferguson seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.
- 5. General Public Comment** – There were no speakers for public comment.
- 6. Committee Discussion: May 12th Public Forum** – Dave Hill gave a schedule update, noting that traffic analysis and the elementary school site design options would be available for the June 23rd meeting; stormwater management information would also be available soon. Slides with Public Forum #2 (May 5th) results were shown on the screen, found at <https://www.letsplanhuntersville.org/publicinputforum>. Staff was asked about the importance of the results; Dave Hill indicated the Forum results were helpful but not considered statistically

significant. There was also a question about how the consultant team would use the results; staff answered that the Committee was the most informed source of input, and that continued consultant work would be useful. A comment was made that the Mobility element of the Plan was the most important. There was discussion about how Downtown roadway projects would fare among other regional transportation priorities; staff answered that feasibility would be addressed later in the project. There was another comment showing interest in the East-West Connector. The question was raised about the Connector's intent – is it to help the Downtown or just make it easier to pass through. The Connector may jeopardize more trees or disrespect the adjacent neighborhood. Other comments supported the Connector. Another comment was made that the Connector could distract the Town from other Downtown priorities. The issue of sidewalks was also raised. How will the Connector help relieve congestion where it is worst – on Huntersville – Concord Road. The connection to 2nd Street would be helpful, but feasibility was questioned. There was more discussion about other east-west travel options in Huntersville. The comment was made that the Mobility element was not just about streets, but other modes of transportation. Feasibility of rail transit was discussed; Committee members agreed that this issue would be addressed in the future, but not right now.

Committee Discussion: Draft Alternative Futures (Mobility, Nature, Gathering, Living, Civic, Soul) - Discussion continued regarding the Mobility element. Concern was expressed that the East-West Connector would violate several Organizing Principles. A comment was made that Mobility element was really a traffic-dominated plan that might not have any tangible benefits. The importance of public transit (Red Line) was emphasized as a critical need. Everywhere in the county except for the Lake Norman area is benefitting from light rail service. Questions were raised regarding the intent of all the roadway recommendations. Staff indicated that one priority was to accommodate traffic destined for the Downtown and to convince pass-through traffic to find other routes to travel through the Town. More discussion entailed the impact of the East-West Connector on the new elementary school, and the possibility of reducing the queuing that currently occurs on Sherwood.

- Lee Hallman made the motion that the proposed East-West Connector be eliminated from further consideration in the Committee's final master plan; the motion was seconded by Gatewood Campbell. Sarah McCauley urged the Committee to refrain from taking a vote, and to take a straw vote instead. Lee Hallman amended his motion to make it a straw vote, also agreed to by Gatewood Campbell. Discussion on the motion ensued. A concern was voiced that CMS could put 2 schools in place on their property, causing far more traffic problems. Another comment was made that the timing of Gilead improvements was too far into the future to be relevant now. A question was raised asking if the Committee was limiting the process and plan by acting before all information is provided by the consultants.

The vote on the motion: Yes: 6 / No: 5 / Abstain: 2

The Chairman indicated that the motion failed.

The Stumptown Road connection over I-77 was discussed. There is not sufficient space to build a new interchange at Stumptown / I-77. This will also cause the closing of the railroad crossing at Ramah Church Road. Staff indicated that, in order to get a new railroad crossing, Norfolk Southern typically requires the closing of two public crossings and four private crossings.

On-street parking was discussed. A question was asked if on-street parking was limited to Gilead. Staff answered that on-street parking was also recommended for NC 115 if the one-way traffic option was selected between the round-a-bouts; the only reason for recommending one-way traffic on NC 115 is to introduce on-street parking. If not, the one-way strategy would not be recommended.

Other Organizing Principles were discussed. Some comments were made, but no major conclusions were reached by the Committee for Nature or Gathering elements. There was some discussion regarding the Living element, with mixed comments regarding appropriate residential intensity / density in the Downtown. It was also mentioned that Mecklenburg County wastewater capacity will severely limit the issuance of building permits in the Downtown (and other parts of Huntersville) until 2024. The relationship between housing density and interest in nonresidential development (i.e. – retail, services) was mentioned as critical. The Downtown is also in competition with Birkdale and its planned improvements. The need to be progressive and innovative was mentioned. The 'right' type of demographic is needed to generate the numbers that justify new investment and development. Comparisons to Cornelius and Davidson were discussed; the primary concern was how to 'turn the corner' and achieve the character needed to become successful. There were varying opinions about the type of retails and service establishments considered to be desirable. The Civic element was discussed next. Support for a civic plaza, like that proposed in the 2006 Plan. In the past, purchase of the Cashion's property was recommended to create a major public space. The location of a new Town Hall was also discussed. Staff gave an update, indicating that no new cost information was available.

- Elaine Kerns made a straw vote motion to locate the new Town Hall on the NE corner of Gilead and NC 115. The motion was later amended to add that the design should reflect the recommendations contained in the 2006 Downtown Plan and possibly include a partnership with Holbrook House; the motion was seconded by Bob Lemon. Charles Guinard asked for a friendly amendment to include the demolition of the existing Town Hall, thus allowing the introduction of on-street parking on NC 115. The friendly amendment was not formally accepted. Several questions and concerns were raised; most of them addressed cost and the extent of possible improvements (such as a parking garage).

The vote on the motion: Yes: 6 / No: 1 / Abstain: 5

The Chairman indicated that the motion failed.

The Soul element was cited as the most important part of the Plan and should be the first topic addressed during Committee meetings.

- 7. Next Steps** - Dave Hill told the Committee that additional information would be available prior the June 23rd meeting. Tracy Barron updated the Committee on community outreach volunteer opportunities. The Committee was notified that Barbara Gerhardt would replace Don Gest on the Committee. A request was made to add the Juneteenth Jubilee to the list of events where the volunteers could provide Downtown Plan information. There was also some discussion about social media outreach and other ways to get more people involved in the process.
- 8. Adjourn** - The meeting adjourned at 7:40 PM.