

The regular meeting of the Murphy Town Council was held on January 3, 2023 at 5:00 pm at City Hall.

Town Manager: Chad Simons
Attorney: Mack Cowan

Council: Barry McClure, Frank Dickey
Keisha Dockery, Gail Stansell
Charlene Smith
Mayor Tim Radford

Mayor Tim Radford led the town with the pledge of allegiance.

Approval of Agenda

Motion was made by McClure to approve the Agenda as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Public Comment

None.

Approval of the Minutes

Motion was made by Stansell to approve the December 5, 2022 meeting minutes as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Tax Releases

Town Manager Chad Simons presented a \$.57 tax release for interest that was mistakenly posted, for tax account 4244.

Motion was made by Stansell to approve the tax release as presented. Motion carried unanimously. A copy of the release is attached in the minute book.

Approval of the 2023 Fiscal Year Audit Contract

Town Manager Chad Simons stated the contract included a five percent increase from the previous year, but was warranted given the amount of state and federal grant awards the town received.

Motion was made by Dockery to approve the audit contract as presented in the amount of \$29,900. Motion carried unanimously. A copy of the contract is published in the minute book.

Murphy Housing Authority Approval of New Signatory

Housing Director Lea Montgomerie informed the Council that Kenny White was retiring, and the town needed to approve of Rhonda Adams as a new signatory on the Murphy Housing checking account.

Mayor Radford asked about Ms. Adams' experience. Lea Montgomerie said Mrs. Adams has been with Murphy Housing Authority since 2016.

Motion was made by McClure to add Ms. Rhonda Adams as a new signatory to the Murphy Housing Authority banking account. Motion carried unanimously. Motion carried unanimously.

Rural Transformation Grant Update

Mayor Radford introduced Downtown Director Laura Lachance, who presented an update on the town's upcoming town square project.

Mrs. Lachance stated that the town received \$665,000 to upgrade the four pocket parks into a cohesive town square. Mrs. Lachance said the grant is funded by federal dollars through the North Carolina Department of Commerce through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Murphy pursued the project to revitalize downtown, but noted that the project coincided nicely with the upcoming milling/repaving project by NCDOT and the need to replace the water/sewer infrastructure in downtown – the town applied for \$4.9 million of funding to replace the downtown infrastructure in order to prevent tearing up new asphalt put in place by NCDOT crews in 2024.

Mrs. Lachance provided a timeline concerning the project.

In 2018, the Town collaborated with NCDOT to do a traffic/parking feasibility study. NCDOT hired Vaughn and Melton to do the work, and their firm developed and recommended a plan. The plan included bringing the travel lanes down from 4 to 3, with the center lane to be used as a turn lane and parking for trucks. Mrs. Lachance said it would increase safety for drivers and pedestrians, according to NCDOT traffic engineers and consultants.

In early 2022, NCDOT approached the Town to inform them that they will be remilling and repaving downtown Murphy in 2023 or 2024, and encouraged the town to replace their downtown infrastructure. The project would be a good opportunity to introduce some of the concepts from the 2018 traffic feasibility study performed by Vaughn and Melton.

NCDOT modeled several scenarios, and one of them included a dedicated left turning lane on each of the four streets. That option showed even more traffic congestion. The one-lane roundabout scored the best, according to their models. The NCDOT also agreed to reduce the four lane traffic into three single lanes to enhance pedestrian safety and traffic flow. The plan will provide extra space for town parking, making downtown parking much safer for longer trucks.

Mrs. Lachance added that the roundabout and milling/repaving project is funded entirely by NCDOT – and not by the Rural Transformation Grant.

In July, the Town decided to apply for the second round of the Rural Transformation Grant – as the timing was perfect. The Town hired Regeneration by Design as the landscape architect to develop concepts for the town square, and those concepts received public input from several Main Street committees and town council members.

The downtown square project does not change downtown parking orientation or quantity, and it does not cut into the footprint of the pocket parks; nor does it require the elimination of the Veterans Memorial. The grant does not require a match. Mrs. Lachance said the town will work with the Charters of Freedom organization to relocate the Bill of Rights and Declaration of Independence monuments.

Mrs. Lachance reviewed the plan design, and discussed the stage and brick-layer design. The project will enhance open spaces in downtown, making it more inviting for residents and visitors – and ultimately increasing the economic vitality of downtown Murphy.

Mrs. Lachance concluded by reminding the Town Council that the town also has grant applications outstanding to replace 16,000 linear feet of water/sewer lines in downtown.

Mr. Frank Dickey said the NCDOT assured the Council that the Town would remain accessible even with the NCDOT work. Mr. Dickey also said the pedestrian crossings being moved back is a very positive change for pedestrian traffic.

Mayor Radford said one of the biggest complaints he receives concerns the dangers of downtown parking, and this project resolves that. He also added that the emergence of two lane traffic into one lane is dangerous too, and the roundabout also resolves that.

Mrs. Keisha Dockery also added that the town will save a lot of money on paving expenses with the water and sewer work. Mrs. Dockery also thanked Mrs. Lachance for addressing the large amount of misinformation concerning this project, and encouraged citizens to contact her and Council Members directly if they needed additional information.

Mrs. Charlene Smith said change is always hard, and growing pains will be dealt with – but the town will be much better off in the long run with all of this work completed.

Mayor Radford said he did not like the idea of a roundabout initially, but after completing research he changed his mind on roundabouts.

Mr. Barry McClure said pedestrian safety in downtown is badly in need of improvement, and he avoids walking at some downtown locations at certain times because it is so unsafe.

Mrs. Gail Walker Stansell said the Council needed to request that the NCDOT attend a future meeting and review the roundabout project, and educate citizens about them.

Monthly Reports

Motion was made by Smith to approve the monthly reports as presented. Motion carried unanimously. A copy of the monthly reports are attached in the minute book.

Discussion

Mr. Frank Dickey inquired about fiber replacement with the downtown rehab project. Town Manager Chad Simons said Mayor Radford has had discussion with our internet providers, and discussed with them about sharing trenches to upgrade downtown fiber speeds for businesses and residents.

Adjourn

Motion was made by McClure to adjourn the meeting at 5:45 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.