

**TOWN OF ABINGDON
COUNCIL RETREAT
THURSDAY, JULY 15, 2021 – 8:30 AM
JUBILEE HOUSE RETREAT AND CONFERENCE CENTER**

A Retreat of the Abingdon Town Council was held on Thursday, July 15, 2021 at 8:30 am at the Jubilee House Retreat and Conference Center.

A. WELCOME – *Mayor Webb*

B. ROLL CALL

Members of Council Present:

Mike Owens
James Anderson
Amanda Pillion
Donna Quetsch, Vice Mayor
Derek Webb, Mayor

Meeting Facilitators:

Kimball Payne, The Berkley Group
Kelsey Wong, The Berkley Group

Mr. Payne thanked the Council members for the opportunity to facilitate their retreat. He provided information on his background in local government. Ms. Wong also introduced herself.

Mr. Payne suggested the following goals for the retreat:

- Get to know each other better and build relationships
- Work as a team and develop consensus
- Identify steps to improve Council effectiveness
- Gain a better understanding of Council, Mayor, and Manager roles and responsibilities
- Develop a plan for utilizing ARPA funding
- Identify major goals and priorities
- Identify objectives, with assigned responsibility and timelines, to advance the goals
- Craft a work plan for the next 18 to 24 months
- Understand constraints to progress and identify means to overcome them

He then mentioned some themes that might run through the day's discussions:

- Council dynamics and processes
- Council/manager/mayor roles, responsibilities, and relationship
- Public engagement
- Limitations – staff, finances, time, statutes, Dillon Rule

He concluded his introductory remarks by listing some proposed ground rules for the retreat:

- Everyone participates

- Engage
- Be honest
- Listen to each other
- Respect different opinions
- No idea is too outlandish
- Seek to understand
- Ask questions
- Seek consensus (formal action at a future Council meeting)
- Use the parking lot for issues that may evade consensus or require more background
- Have fun
- We will take breaks when it seems appropriate

Council accepted the goals and ground rules by unanimous consent.

Mr. Payne then asked each Council member to answer the following questions: *Why do you serve on Council? What would you like to be remembered for? Tell your colleagues something about yourself that they probably don't know.*

The Council members spoke to a desire to serve the town and make it a better place for citizens. Each said that he or she didn't really want to leave a personal legacy but just wanted to do what they thought was best for the community. Council members also shared interesting facts and stories about themselves.

To get an understanding of Council's vision for Abingdon, Mr. Payne asked the members to describe the Town of Abingdon in the future (5,10, 20 years out) and to suggest what would be different or better as a result of this Council's initiatives. The responses were captured on Flip Chart #1, as follows:

Future

Affordable housing

Young families

Vibrant downtown

Unique (not Asheville) – be yourself [*a desire for Abingdon to be Abingdon and not try to copy another community.*]

Community

Tourism destination

Service center for the region (w/in 1.5 hr. drive)

Adequate workforce

Active, engaged citizenry

Financially stable, sustainable

Vibrant small business community

Mr. Payne then shared with Council the common themes and other issues that he heard when he conducted interviews with each Council member in preparation for the retreat.

Common Themes

- ARPA funding and how to use it
- Infrastructure projects: Park St, Main St. flooding, Fields Penn House; Meadows complex
- CIP
- Council relations; unity, communications
- Council/Manager roles and responsibilities
- Rules of Procedure for effective meetings
- Outsourcing operations at the wastewater treatment plant (WWTP)

Other Issues/Ideas

- Tourism plan
- Non-profit advisory council
- Charter change
- Historic properties
- Events philosophy
- Mountain bike park
- Stable finances
- Disposition of underutilized Town properties

He said that it was time to start discussing the issues identified by Council members and suggested starting with Town Council expectations, relationships, and effectiveness.

The following questions were offered to encourage the conversation.

- *How is Council doing as a governing body?*
- *What is working well?*
- *What areas might need improvement?*
- *Are there any expectations that are not being met?*
- *What is the quality of communications among Council members?*
- *How effective, useful, or relevant is Council's Code of Ethics? What changes might be appropriate?*
- *How effective, useful, or relevant are Council's Meeting Rules and Regulations? What changes might be appropriate?*

The discussion of Council's performance evolved to include the Town Manager. Mr. Payne had offered the following questions regarding that relationship.

- *How is the relationship between the Manager and Council?*
- *Are roles, responsibilities, and boundaries understood and respected by Council members, employees, and the public?*
- *Are performance expectations documented, understood, and followed up on?*
- *What areas need clarification or improvement?*
- *What is the quality of communications between the Manager and Council?*

The facilitator reviewed the principles of the council/manager form of government and the roles and responsibilities, as well as boundaries, between the Council, the manager, and staff. The role of the Mayor and Council's expectations of that position were also discussed.

Among the principles of the Council/Manager form of government that Mr. Payne reviewed were the following:

- ❖ The Council determines the vision for the community and adopts ordinances, and sets policy, among its other responsibilities, to achieve the vision.
- ❖ Council acts as a body, in public by majority vote; no single Council member has the authority solely to set or change policy, or commit town resources
- ❖ Council hires a professional manager to serve as the chief administrative officer of the organization
- ❖ The manager is apolitical, is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the local government, and operates under a code of ethics
- ❖ The manager's specific responsibilities and authority are stipulated by state statute, local charter, and local code.
- ❖ The manager is responsible for personnel management of the organization and, except as may be limited by charter, hires, trains, disciplines, and terminates all employees of the local government.
- ❖ Except for positions reporting directly to the governing body, Council has no role in personnel management beyond adopting organizational policies and procedures.
- ❖ Council directs staff through the manager; no Council member has the authority to give direction to staff
- ❖ One of the manager's primary responsibilities is to keep the Council informed. Sharing information with Council is guided by the following principles:
 - Information is shared with all Council members equally and at the same time
 - Responses to inquiries from individual Council members are shared with all Council members
 - Council learns of bad news from the manager first
 - There should be no surprises

Points from the discussion were captured on Flip Charts #2 and #3. Asterisks (*) indicate an action item.

Flip Chart #2

Council

Communications could be better *[among Council members]*

***Behavioral expectations on agenda** *[in response to concerns about certain citizens disrupting Council meetings and how the Mayor, as presiding officer, might address that – the facilitator offered to provide an example]*

Trust – address immediately

Informed

Orientation

***Agenda summary sheet** *[a summary of the agenda item will be provided along with backup information – the facilitator agreed to provide an example]*

Electronic agendas *[four of the five Council members agreed to receive the agenda packet electronically]*

5 calendar days in advance *[of the meeting is when the agenda packet will be delivered]*
[Council also agreed that it was not necessary to include proof of publication in the agenda packets.]

Flip Chart #3

Mayor -Expectations

Presider

Facilitator of decision making

Ceremonial head/spokesperson

Communicator

Manager

Value of monthly reports

***Annual evaluation (template)** *[the facilitator agreed to provide a template for consideration]*

Council broke for lunch at noon and reconvened at 12:45 p.m.

Director of Economic Development and Tourism/Assistant Town Manager Tonya Triplett and Director of Finance Steve Trotman joined the group for the afternoon session of the retreat.

Mr. Payne suggested that before addressing specific topics identified on the agenda, Council discuss town operations. He asked the following questions:

- *Are there other areas of Town operations that should be addressed?*
- *What is the Town doing well?*

- *What could be done better?*
- *Is there anything that the Town is not doing that it should be doing?*
- *Is there anything that the Town is doing that it could stop doing?*

The discussion was capture on Flip Charts #4-#6.

Flip Chart #4

Town Ops

Doing well

Council
Core Services
Supporting staff
Business support
Financial stability
County relations

Flip Chart #5

Could Do Better

Doing too much
Chamber & others stepping up
Dependency
Communicate good news (brag)
***Tourism plan (6 mos.), w/metrics (ROI)**
Code enforcement
Project completion
Abingdon Main Street
County relations
Relationship with schools – facilities use

Flip Chart #6

Stop

Buying and maintaining historic properties
Doing things the way they have always been done; e.g.,
Tourism
Non-profit funding
Rec. center (Coomes)
Fire Protection Services

Stop subsidizing the County

[Non-profit app*] [the facilitator agreed to share an example from another community]

Being adversarial

The discussion continued with a focus on specific action items and how to utilize the \$8.2 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds that the Town would be receiving. Mr. Payne also suggested some questions to ask when considering alternative forms of service delivery, such as outsourcing operations at the WWTP.

1. Should the service be delivered by government?
2. What are the expectations related to service delivery?
3. How well is the service being delivered?
4. Can service delivery be improved in house?
5. Should the service be contracted out?
6. What are the legal implications?
7. How to measure performance and ensure accountability?
8. What will happen to existing employees who are currently responsible for service delivery?

With respect to the WWTP, Mr. Morani advised that the Town would be receiving proposals from firms interested in operating the facility and that he would be bringing together a team to review the proposals. There was a discussion about the advisability of including a member, or members, of Council on the review team. Ms. Quetsch expressed an interest in serving on the review team and Council agreed by unanimous consent.

Major points from the discussion were captured on Flip Charts #7-#9.

Flip Chart #7

To Do

Expand Historic District

Infrastructure

Stormwater/flooding

Sports Complex – Finish work → complete the master plan, restrooms

Operations plan (Jan. 1)

House – research, RFP?

[Set aside] \$2 million [of ARPA funds to complete the work in the original construction bid that was deferred due to cost and available funding]

***Next agenda – Aug 2nd – Bike Park? (in triangle)**

Spring – Bid batting cage

Review master plan – 90 days

Flip Chart #8

ARPA \$

- **Stormwater - #1, hire an engineer by Oct 1**
 - **Immediately – figure out where you are on stormwater management** [*what work has been done previously is still relevant?*]
 - **\$4 million**
- **Creeper Trail Trestles**
 - **\$1-1.25 million** [*settled on \$1.25 million*]
 - **Bid by March 1, 2022**
- **Green Spring Road** [*culvert replacement and associated work*]
 - **0.825 million**
 - **Hire engineer by Oct 1**

Flip Chart #9

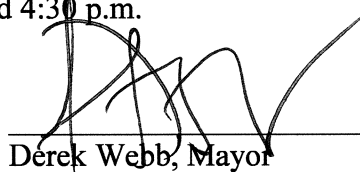
***Adopt CIP for FY2023** [*and subsequent years*] – **May 2022**

Aug 2 – ARPA plan to Council

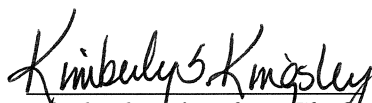
Sep 7th – Outsourcing WWTP [*operations*] **decision**

This concluded the retreat. Mr. Payne thanked the Council on behalf of himself, Ms. Wong, and The Berkley Group for the opportunity to be of service. He advised that he would prepare notes from the retreat and provide them to Mr. Morani for use as he deemed appropriate. Council members expressed their appreciation for Mr. Payne's and Ms. Wong's assistance.

Mayor Webb declared the meeting adjourned 4:30 p.m.



Derek Webb, Mayor


Kimberly Kingsley, Clerk