CITY OF MOUNT HOLLY
MOUNT HOLLY CITY COUNCIL
Work Session
April 28, 2008
7:00 pm

Members present: Mayor Robert Whitt, Councilmen David Moore, Jerry Bishop, Frank McLean, Bennie Brookshire, Perry Toomey, and Councilwoman Carolyn Breyare.

Staff present: Eric Davis, City Manager, Jamie Guffey, Assistant City Manager, Danny Jackson, Assistant City Manager, Greg Beal, Planner, Mike Santmire, Streets and Solid Waste Director Chief Oplinger, Fire Chief, and Chief David Belk, Chief of Police, Kemp Michael, City Attorney

CALL TO ORDER BY THE MAYOR
Mayor Whitt called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

INVOCATION
Councilman McLean led the Council, Mayor, staff members and attendees in prayer.

SET THE AGENDA
Mayor Whitt asked for any additions or changes to the agenda. There were none from Council. Mayor Whitt asked that Todd Vandermeid be added as Item 1 on the Agenda. He is requesting permission to sell beer and wine at the Alive After 5 on Thursday, May 29, 2008 and would need this approval in order to secure sponsors.

There being no other items to add or discuss, Mayor Whitt entertained a motion to set the agenda as amended.

Motion: Councilman Moore made a motion to set the agenda as amended. Councilman McLean seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

AGENDA

1. Permission to Sell Beer and Wine at the Alive after 5 event on May 29, 2008, presented by Mr. Todd Vandermeid

Mr. Vandermeid stated that at the last Alive After 5 event, three to four hundred people attended. At the request of many people, he decided to tentatively arrange for a date of May 29, 2008 for the next Alive After 5 and is requesting permission of Council to serve beer and wine in same designated area as with other Alive After 5 events.

Councilman Moore asked Chief Belk if there have been any incidents during these events. Chief Belk reported that there have been no incidents at any event.

Councilwoman Breyare asked if arm bands could be dispensed for those who are drinking inside the perimeter. Councilman Moore thought that these bands would probably be free of charge from beer sponsors. She also asked that the alcoholic beverages be served in a plain cup without advertising on it.

Councilman Brookshire asked if the City Café is the only area for alcohol sales and Mr. Vandermeid said that it was.

There being no other questions or comments, Mayor Whitt asked Council what action they wished to take this evening on this matter.

Motion: Councilman Bishop made a motion to approve the sale of beer and wine in the designated roped off area by City Café for the May 29, 2008 Alive After 5 event. Councilman Moore seconded the motion and the motion passed by a vote of 5 to 1, with Councilman McLean casting the dissenting vote.

Mayor Whitt thanked Mr. Vandermeid for his efforts.

2. Discussion of Fitness Center Operations, presented by Danny Jackson, Assistant City Manager

Mayor Whitt asked Council if they wished to hear from those persons interested in the Fitness Center before the staff report. Council wished to hear from the citizens first. Mayor Whitt invited Mr. Eddie Wilson to come to the podium to speak.

Eddie Wilson
407 Timberlane Dr.
Mount Holly, NC

Mr. Wilson stated that he was a lifetime resident of Mount Holly and has lived in the City limits since 1970. He said that he was here tonight to get an affirmative vote from the City to continue to maintain the fitness center for current and future use. From the information he has obtained from his research and from Mr. Guffey, it has been determined that the fitness center is currently operating in the red. In addition, he discovered that the Tuck Center is also operating in the red.

Mr. Wilson stated the reasons the Fitness Center should stay open:

- There is "free" rent ($1.00 a year) on the current building.
- The facility is in a good upgraded condition.
- Most members that use the center are Senior Citizens.
- Some members that use the center are in rehab and have health issues like knee replacements, heart conditions and the center helps with their recovery.
- Unlike the YMCA, the cost of membership of the center is very affordable.
- There are also a few afterschool programs.

Mr. Wilson offered the following recommendations to Council regarding the Fitness Center:

1. Keep the center open and on schedule as it is currently operated.
2. If this is not feasible, reduce hours of operation, if there are budget restraints.
3. Consolidate the center equipment into the Tuck Center.
4. Wherever the fitness equipment goes, it should always be available to citizens.

5. The membership fees can be increased.

Mayor Whitt thanked Mr. Wilson for his presentation and asked him to leave the petition with the City for the record. He also recognized the fact that there were interested supporters in the audience and asked them to raise their hands. Mr. Wilson stated that there are about 100 signatures on the petition.

Mayor Whitt invited Mr. Jackson to give a staff report on this matter. Mr. Jackson began his presentation by stating that in a recent four month period there have been 294 visitors to the Fitness Center. There is a core group of 20-25 people who use the center 3 times a week. Most of this core group live in Mount Holly. Seniors ages 55 and over can use the center free of charge while others inside the City are charged $7.00 a month and anyone outside the City is charged $25 a month.

Mayor Whitt asked where would the weight and fitness equipment be relocated to if the center was no longer in existence. Mr. Jackson stated that many options were discussed and it was thought that the equipment would go to the Police Department at the Citizens Center or the Tuck Center with some modification of walls and space there.

Mayor Whitt stated that it is costing the City around $19,800 over a four month period to keep the Fitness Center open with costs such as salaries, utilities, supplies and maintenance with expected revenue over a four month period forecasted to be approximately $1,500.

Councilmen Bishop and Moore felt that the Tuck Center would be a good location for this facility with some modifications. Also, the center could have extended hours and maintenance service that the Tuck Center already offers.

Mr. Davis stated that at this point, Council is not under any deadline to make a decision. He advised keeping the fitness center service open for the time being. He added that this center will never break even nor will it ever be a money maker.

Mayor Whitt stated that he is the culprit in questioning spending $60,000 of taxpayers' money for a center that currently facilitates up to 50 people. It is a lot of money to spend on a small amount of people. However, it is strictly Council's decision to keep the Fitness Center open.

Mayor Whitt thanked Mr. Wilson for his presentation and thanked all interested citizens in the audience for attending.

Councilman Moore stated that nothing will change in the next month or two or possibly through the calendar year but dues should be paid.

Councilman Toomey added that in the last edition of the Mt. Holly newsletter, the Fitness Center was asking for new members. He suggested that the City should be quite clear in our intentions regarding the Fitness Center and we should communicate that to the members. Mayor Whitt added that the city can't guarantee that the fees wouldn't go up and he wanted the members to know that as well.

3. Report on Collaborative Partners Committee, presented by Ann Danzi
Ms. Danzi stated that as a matter of interest, at the Whitewater Center for the Olympic Trials, the Foundation had a tent and table set up where they handed out information on Mount Holly such as the Tuck Park, Greenways, and a guide to Mount Holly restaurants.

Ms. Danzi reported that the Collaborative Partners Committee met in August 2006. At this meeting, each municipality present decided on items needing the highest priority for the County. One theme dominated which was collaboration between the various municipalities and the County.

Currently the Co-Chairmen of the Collaborative Partners Committee are Mayor Boyce of Belmont and Mayor Austell of Cherryville. Since last April, the Committee has worked on the School Bond issue and currently is working on the Carolina Thread Trail. She added that they have been discussing tourism, marketing county-wide, and branding the County.

The next meeting for the Collaborative Partners Committee will occur on May 27, 2008 in Cherryville. Dr. Melinda Lowery and Dr. Loretta Dodgen of Multiple Choice, Inc. will be the speakers regarding the subject of County branding. Since she will be out of town for this meeting, Ms. Danzi requested that someone from Mount Holly might wish to attend this meeting in her place.

Mayor Whitt thanked Ms. Danzi for the information and for representing Mount Holly on this Committee. He added that he was not available for this meeting but wished someone from Council or staff to attend this meeting and to please let Ms. Danzi know that you will be attending.

4. Economic Development Division of the Gaston Chamber of Commerce, presented by Elyse Cochran, President of the Gaston Regional Chamber, Executive Director of the Economic Development Division
Ms. Cochran stated that the Economic Development Division was created in 2003. Prior to that the Chamber had an economic development marketing effort for a couple of years and so did Gaston County which was very counterproductive. These efforts were merged into a 501C3 organization, the Economic Development Division of the Chamber. Their whole purpose is to generate private sector and municipal funds to invest in marketing Gaston County for different types of business. In a year, the Economic Development Division generates around $250,000 of which 70% is dispersed to the Economic Development Commission (Donnie Hicks, Director) and 30% to Workforce Development.

The municipal partners are the Cities of Gastonia and Cherryville with the City of Belmont making a commitment. She hoped that the Cities of Mount Holly and Bessemer City would do the same commitment as well as other neighboring cities and towns.

Ms. Cochran stated that economic development means different things to different communities. For some it is increasing tourism, high end retail, office, the creation and retention of jobs, investments, education, transportation and other aspects.

Councilman McLean asked about the status of county wide water and sewer. Ms. Cochran stated that the County Commissioners ordered a study regarding the governance of this system. The study will be completed in September.

Councilman Toomey stated that the City of Mount Holly has an Economic Development Committee and he felt they would like to hear a presentation from Ms. Cochran.

Mr. Davis stated that after talking with Donnie Hicks about Mount Holly joining, there has been no definite decision as of yet but lots of interest. This will be discussed at the budget meetings.

Ms. Cochran stated that $5,000 in annual dues includes at least 2 marketing trips all over the nation - all expenses paid, for members. The $3,000 dues include one marketing trip.

Mayor Whitt thanked Ms. Cochran for coming to the meeting and giving a presentation.

5. Discussion of Sign Ordinance Revisions, presented by Greg Beal, Planner

Mr. Davis stated that staff received instructions from Council at the last Council Work Session to come back with examples of signs that comply with the Sign Ordinances from other neighboring jurisdictions.

Mr. Beal cited examples of appropriate signs in the Cities of Davidson, Cornelius, and Huntersville for his PowerPoint presentation. The City of Belmont was not used as an example since it is so familiar to Council and choosing these other cities provided a fresh insight.

Mr. Davis stated that the presentation gives options and information to draft a model ordinance. He suggested that any further sign study be divided into categories such as signs in the highway area and signs in the downtown area. Staff should come up with some procedures involving the public and report back to Council. He added that taking the time to get this right is important to avoid future controversy. Mr. Beal suggested that information on this matter be provided to the newsletter to let people know that there will be possible changes in the Sign Ordinance. Mayor Whitt added that there will be an amortization period for sign owners whose signs do not comply with the new Sign Ordinance but will be afforded a chance to change their sign to comply in a five year period.

It was the consensus of Council to proceed further into this study.

6. Discussion of Grand Hall Rental Policy, presented by Eric Davis, City Manager

Mr. Davis stated that the Citizens Center is near completion and the City is already getting requests to rent the Grand Hall for birthday parties, graduation parties, wedding receptions, and other activities such as sports banquets

Mr. Davis stated that no decision needs to be made tonight but asked Council for guidance on what kind of events should occur in the Grand Hall and how much to charge for the Grand Hall's use. He added that the Grand Hall does not have room for catering supplies like tables and chairs and does not have a kitchen like the Tuck Center, just a microwave.

Councilman Toomey stated that on August 23, 2008, there will be a Sports Hall of Fame banquet and we intend selling tickets so we need to know something now on whether we can use the Grand Hall. He added that the Grand Hall may not be the space for 300 or more people for this activity.

Councilman Moore felt that the cost shouldn't be too high so that citizens can use the facility. He added that a staff person should be present at all activities so there is a cost in that.

Councilman Toomey asked Mr. Jackson what does it cost to rent the Tuck Center. Mr. Jackson stated that it costs $40-$50 an hour with a three hour minimum to rent the center and if it is a city sponsored event, it is free. It cannot be used as a place for a money-making or a commercial activity. He added that Churches may not rent the facility as they will rent it as a primary location.

Councilwoman Breyare wondered about who will clean the building and the maintenance of the floor as there will be scuffing of the floors and possible scarring of them with event use, and should a cleaning deposit be required.

Mr. Davis stated that the flooring is somewhat fragile and will not take a lot of abuse from tables and chairs.

Mayor Whitt suggested a rental fee of $1,000 per event for the Grand Hall. Councilman Moore thought that at that price, not all the citizens could afford to use it.

Councilman Brookshire felt that a time limit for each event was needed.

Councilwoman Breyare wondered what the Schiele Museum and Stowe Botanical Garden charges for use of their facility.

Councilman Brookshire thought that an independent cleaning company should quote on the maintenance fee on an event basis.

Mayor Whitt suggested a $500 event fee plus the clean up fee.

Councilwoman Breyare asked what requirements would be needed if alcohol could be served at an event. Chief Belk stated that whoever sponsors the event would have to secure an ABC permit and the City would not be involved.

Councilman Bishop wondered if the Grand Hall should be rented only to Mount Holly residents.

Councilman Toomey thought that if the City doesn't rent the Grand Hall, the City never needed it in the first place.

Mayor Whitt stated that the City can co-sponsor the Sports Hall of Fame event by providing the Grand Hall and the Sports Hall of Fame Committee will pay for the clean up. He also requested that the City, as co-sponsor of this Mount Holly event, be featured on their program.

Mr. Jackson stated that he will get quotes from cleaning companies. Councilman Toomey stated that he will wait for this information before proceeding.

It was the consensus of Council to wait to consider renting the Grand Hall until they received more information from staff on what other facilities charge, what deposits are required, what the City policies should be, what kind of events can be allowed, whether alcohol use is permitted, time of use, clean up fees and whether to buy floor maintenance equipment and have the City care for the floors, etc.

Mayor Whitt called for a 5 minute break at 8:45 pm.
Mayor Whitt called the meeting back to order at 8:50 pm.

7. Discussion of Highway 273 Intersection Realignment, presented by Mike Santmire, Streets and Solid Waste Director, Chief David Belk, Chief of Police, and Chief Dale Oplinger, Fire Chief

Mr. Davis stated that the 273 intersection realignment is located around the hospital where the acceleration lanes and deceleration lanes come together.

Mr. Santmire referred to the handout and the options to improve this location highlighted on the presentation map. Some of the highlights of his presentation are as follows:

- The project would cost $1,209.
- A hard guardrail would cost $2,025.
- Lots of signage would have to be put in to denote a traffic pattern change.
- Reflective diamonds with posts instead of guardrails would be cheaper at around $500.

An analysis of the effect of traffic changes was provided in the handout by Chief Oplinger and a traffic survey was discussed in the handout regarding Beatty Road, Ferstl Avenue, and Beatty Drive by Chief Belk.

Councilman Bishop wanted staff to check in with DOT on this project, even though it is considered a city road, and he wanted NCDOT to be involved with this. Councilman McLean agreed.

Mr. Davis stated that staff was directed to come up with a minimum cost on this project and this has been done today. Ideally, a complete redesign of the intersection is needed as it is an awkward intersection.

Mayor Whitt thought that the hospital might pay for large portion of this project and asked staff to contact the hospital and ask them if they would pay for some of the costs of an engineering study and to let them know that staff is contacting NCDOT to address the situation.

8. Discussion of Resolution supporting Discovery Place Kids Museum, presented by Mayor Whitt

Mayor Whitt stated that a Resolution may be in order to welcome the Discovery Place Kids Museum in eastern Gaston County. It was the consensus of Council and the Mayor to place the Resolution on the Consent Agenda for the Council meeting on May 12, 2008.

9. Committee Reports

Mayor Whitt invited comments from the different Committee Chairpersons.

Construction Committee

Councilman Toomey of the Construction Committee advised that we are holding payment to Cox and Schepp until we have another walkthrough the Citizens Center.

Councilman Bishop stated that there will be 3 bound rugs in Grand Hall and in the lobby upstairs and the cost will be $20,000. Mayor Whitt felt the City was cheated on the bound carpets as this was not written anywhere and no one knew about it.

Councilman Toomey stated that there was some problem with Cox and Schepp regarding a drainage pipe. Mr. Davis added that this matter was discussed at the Construction meeting. Mr. Santmire was doing some landscaping on Catawba Avenue and saw how the contractor was installing the drainage pipe and called John Hope who had performed inspections work and who determined that the drainage pipe was not acceptable. Cox & Schepp indicated that the contractor was going to do it for half price but since the City didn't approve of the pipe, they decided to charge the full price for another pipe that was acceptable.

Councilman Toomey stated that there is an interior wall in the Admin. Area in the Citizens Center that is 3 inches out of plumb and he will work with Cox & Schepp to get it corrected.

Mayor Whitt requested that the City not pay the architect until all the work is done.

Councilman Toomey stated that Cox & Schepp billed the City an additional $30,000 for work with bad soil where Portland cement was used to stiffen the area. Mr. Guffey stated that the reports from Unifour showed unacceptable areas and these areas match for soil compaction.

Economic Development Committee

Councilwoman Breyare stated that the Economic Development Committee met a few weeks ago with four members, Councilman Toomey, and Mr. Davis. They decided that they would like to invite Elyse Cochran to their next meeting. Mayor Whitt stated that he heard that not all members were notified. Mr. Davis didn't understand why the notice didn't go out but stated that it won't happen again.

Recreation Committee

Councilwoman Breyare stated that the Recreation Committee met and will meet again in 2 weeks.

Beautification Committee

Councilman Moore stated that the Beautification Committee's next meeting will be at Citizens Center where they will look at areas for trees and seeding.

Public Safety Committee

Councilman Brookshire stated that the Public Safety meeting will be next month.

10. Manager's Report, presented by Eric Davis, City Manager

Mr. Davis discussed the following items:

- There will be a meeting this week regarding the website and the problems with the server.
- Two employees have retired – John Hope and Dan Jackson.
- We will be making tentative offers to new planning degreed graduates for City work in Transportation Planning and Recreation Planning.
- We have a timeline to meet all goals on corridor zoning and establishing the moratorium.
- He and Mr. Jackson had a conference call regarding Linear Park with Chuck Flink. There are three options for designs presented.
- To bury cables at the Citizens Center would cost $43,000. Portions of this cost may come out of Linear Park and the Powell Bill.
- A certificate of occupancy has been issued for the Citizens Center.
- AT& T is currently working in the Citizens Center.
- Move-in process is in the works.

Mayor Whitt got a letter from the State Historic Preservation Officer regarding a preliminary assessment of the eligibility of the downtown historic district in Mt. Holly for the National Registry. They are asking for a letter to invite this process and Mayor Whitt was encouraged by Council to comply with this request.

Mayor Whitt stated that he attended the Mayors Conference last week. Spirit of cooperation was the common theme between the attendees.

Councilman Toomey stated that Mayor Ronnie Murphy of Cramerton who is also the TAC (Transportation Advisory Committee) Vice Chairman is a supporter of Mount Holly with regards to roads and streets and he is pushing for the widening of 273.

Councilman Bishop of the Utility Committee stated that they are waiting on W. K. Dickson for the elevated water tank study. He asked staff to call the motorcycle shop on Central Avenue to remind them that they should not park their bikes on the sidewalk.

Mr. Davis stated that he received a quote for $4,200 for security cameras for the parking lot at the Citizens Center. No Change Order would be needed. It was the consensus of Council and the Mayor to install the cameras.

Mr. Guffey presented a mockup of the Mount Holly logo for a flag for the City from Connor Flag Company. It was the consensus of Council and the Mayor was to go with the flag with the original design of the City logo, double sided with the logo, costing $134 each, and ordering extra.

Motion: Councilman Brookshire made a motion to approve the purchase of City logo flags with the original design, double sided, from Connor Flag Company as presented. Councilman McLean seconded the motion. The motion passed by a vote of 5 to 1 with Breyare casting the dissenting vote.

Councilman Toomey asked that the Mount Holly newsletter write an article advising citizens not to blow grass clippings into the streets. He asked staff to look at the dead tree on Madison Dr. by Harold Jackson's house. He added that there are old matters that he has told staff about and nothing is being acted on and he will meet with Mr. Davis about them.

Councilwoman Breyare brought up the topic of abandoned homes in the City. Mr. Jackson requested that Councilwoman Breyare should forward this information to him and he will investigate these homes. She requested cigarette butt receptacles for smokers to be placed around town for those who attend Alive After 5 and other events and asked for some directional signs for the Riverstreet Park off 27.

Mayor Whitt stated that the public wants to wash their cars and water their lawns and there is pressure on Council to relax water restrictions. Mr. Friday stated that the ground water level is still too low to lift restrictions. Councilwoman Breyare stated that she will not wash her car if it means not having enough water in the summer. Councilman Bishop agreed.

Councilman Moore stated that he is still getting calls about Asplundh butchering the trees. Councilman Toomey suggested that Duke Power be notified and Mr. Davis said he would do so.

Councilman Brookshire stated that he has seen an increase in graffiti. Chief Belk stated that officers are aware and anyone caught is taken into custody and must appear in court for vandalism. Councilman Brookshire stated that on Central Avenue there are skates, skateboards being used on City streets. Chief Belk stated that his officers confiscate the skates and skateboards and bring them to the parents with a warning that it is not permitted for their children to skate or skateboard on Central Avenue sidewalks. Lastly, the Mount Holly Arts Foundation is attending our Archives meetings.

Councilman Moore reminded Council and the Mayor about the Community Dinner on Friday night.

Mayor Whitt stated that the CRO is in need of monetary donations. They will be having a Coffee and Cake event at the First Baptist Church on May 15 at 7:00 pm and they are asking for a donation of a 3 year financial commitment.

Mayor Whitt asked for any other questions or comments. There were none.

Motion: Councilman McLean made a motion to adjourn the meeting with Councilman Moore seconding the motion and the motion was approved unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 10:30 pm