
THE SUMMERFIELD HAYSEED

Volume 1, Issue 2

October 2010

Give the Town Manager His Due

This is the right way to do things?

By Dwayne Crawford

Editor

Most towns, when searching for someone to fill an important position such as Town Manager, advertise for that position in order to create a pool of qualified candidates. Most town councils recognize that studying resumes and interviewing numerous people having previous experience for such a responsible position serves the citizenry best. After all, who wouldn't want to find a recruit that would have excellent people skills and best reflect the interests of the taxpayers? Not Summerfield.

When Summerfield went to the Manager / Council form of government, the Town Council decided that they would NOT advertise for that position. Instead they chose to give the position to the Town Administrator. The council justified their decision not to advertise by stating "he's the best." The majority arrived at that decision although they refused to interview any applicants. Had they done so they could have at the very least made a reasonable comparison.

There was some dissent concerning the process of simply giving the Town Manager position to the Town Administrator.

continued on page 2

Nine Months of Laughlin

Council removes qualified zoning board volunteer without reason.

By Dwayne Crawford

Editor

Nine months into her term, Councilwoman Dianne Laughlin has racked up an impressive track record. After two years and an investment of hundreds of volunteer man-hours by 20+ dedicated volunteers, the participation of hundreds of citizens in two open houses, and commitment of over \$200,000 of taxpayer dollars, Laughlin was one of two council members who voted against a new comprehensive master plan. With the exception of Councilwoman Flowers, Laughlin joined in with the majority of council in passing the 2010-2011 budget which re-instituted a town property tax, abandons the comprehensive plan in fundamental ways including funds for purchase of property for a municipal complex/future police station, and directing the Town Manager to resume discussions for a Town core municipal water solution.

continued on page 4

Misrepresented Positions?

"Party Czar" does not apply insists councilmember...

By Dwayne Crawford

Editor

Summerfield council member Dena Barnes spoke critically at the July 13, 2010 council meeting of "a certain unnamed person." Barnes criticism was triggered when the "unnamed individual" described the new employee position included in this year's budget as a "Party Czar." "Party Czar is misrepresentative of the position," Councilwoman Barnes declared from behind the council table.

What is it about the "Party Czar" term that Barnes feels compelled to defend against its use? Why, specifically, is the term "misrepresentative"? Let's examine the facts...

According to approved council minutes, Council first discussed funding the part-time position requested by the Parks and Recreation committee on February 22, 2010. Purpose of

continued on page 4

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

1 Give the Town Manager His Due

1 Nine months of Laughlin

1 Misrepresented Positions?

5 \$75,000+ Remains Uncollected by Town

5 Council Disparity in the Spotlight

(Manager) continued from page 1

Two council members suggested, "Advertise for the position, study all of the resumes, interview the applicants and then, if the Town Administrator is selected as the most qualified of all the applicants for the position of Town Manager, then hire him." However what would appear as a reasonable request and in the best interest of the taxpayers was rejected out of hand by the mayor and the remaining council members.

Two years since, the Town Manager should be recognized and given his due. Construction of the Summerfield Community Park and the new Summerfield Athletic Park, at a combined expense exceeding five million dollars (\$5,000,000), are and have been two of the Town Manager's major responsibilities.

Under the Town Manager's guidance the town successfully built an amphitheater that will accommodate five hundred people. Unfortunately in the planning process, there were only six handicap parking spaces constructed in the park and all other parking for park events is located at the Community Center which has forty parking spaces and is not owned by the Town. Also, parking at the small gravel lot by the dam and along Centerfield Road is no longer available because of requests from those living close to the park. Centerfield Road is now barricaded by the town just past the Community Center through the duration of park events.

Further, the Community Center parking spaces are not available if there is an event scheduled at that facility which coincides with a park event. Other parking was available at the Summerfield Elementary School a short distance away, but new construction at the school will greatly limit parking availability there. To put it simply, the Town Manager oversaw the construction of an amphitheater which did not include adequate parking for those wishing to attend an amphitheater event.

Also during Phase I construction in the park, a picnic shelter was erected over portions of a designated septic repair field. Maps indicating such things as important as "designated septic repair fields" are readily available at the Guilford County Health Department. One would think that it would be best to check before you dig, especially since Guilford County owns the park property and the Town of Summerfield merely leases it. The location of the shelter could present a serious expense to the taxpayers in the future and estimated costs if problematic would be around \$100,000. However, the good news is thus far, the septic repair field has not been required.

Another small snafu has to do with a drain that was constructed in order to accommodate water run off in the park during rain storms. As some know, gravity plays an important

role in how water navigates down and across a particular terrain. As such, it is important to note that since Summerfield Park was constructed in a large drainage area which is subject to heavy water flow, it would be best to construct a drain at ground level so it will capture the run off and prevent pooling. Unfortunately, under the Town Manager's oversight of the pipe drain construction, an important drain head was erected six inches above ground level. That mistake would not necessarily pose a problem in an arid environment. However, Summerfield receives an abundant amount of rainfall. Subsequently, the drain had to be corrected at taxpayers' expense. At the time of this writing, the cost of the necessary repairs is unknown.

Even the Winfree Park / parking lot, across from the current town hall, has not been immune to a momentary lapse in decision making process. Most individuals before they start felling trees in order to erect a fence along a common boundary, would first verify the property line. Not so in Summerfield. After firing up the chain saws and toppling a half dozen trees or more, Town Hall was contacted by the adjacent land owner, who informed staff that the trees cut down were on his property, not the Town's. A check to verify the property line was then performed and the landowner was found to be correct. Fortunately for the town, the landowner was good natured about it and an amicable agreement was reached. Just another day in snafu land.

It is important for the reader to glean additional insight regarding the following bit of history as it pertains specifically to then Town Administrator and the present day Town Manager, and his input and guidance concerning the failed Guilford County Sheriff's Sub-station construction project. This project was to be funded entirely by Summerfield taxpayers and resulted in the subsequent waste of over \$200,000 dollars of taxpayer money.

According to the official recorded minutes of the Summerfield Town Council meeting of March 2, 2004, the

continued on page 3



Waste of taxpayer money? Elevated catch basins in Summerfield's municipal park were recently replaced with ground level units that can actually trap water.

(Manager) continued from page 2

following discussion took place concerning the purchase of the property on Summerfield road for the stated purpose of constructing a Guilford County sheriff's sub-station.

Mayor Dena Barnes: "In our executive session for property and personnel matters, and, we had uh a discussion about some purchase of a property. Uh do we need it in a motion form or just a..."

Town Attorney Trevarro: "Motion to approve."

Mayor Dena Barnes: "Motion to approve the purchase of a piece of property for uh building a sheriff's sub-station."

Town Administrator (Currently our Town Manager): "In the motion do we have to say what it is for?"

Mayor Dena Barnes: "Do what?"

Town Administrator (currently our Town Manager): "Do we have to say exactly what it is for?"

Town Attorney Trevarro: "No."

The Town of Summerfield still owns this parcel of land and has paid thousands of taxpayer dollars keeping it mowed. Council member Flowers suggested on numerous occasions that the Town sell this property. Her suggestion was received with the same disdain as her suggestion to advertise the Town Manager job. Mayor Brown and the remaining council members justified their opposition by stating that this parcel, originally purchased for a County Sheriffs sub-station, was ESSENTIAL for a future Town Hall.

However, less than a year later, the Town leadership now wants to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to buy ten acres for a ten-thousand-square-foot Town hall. They recently justified their new and expensive venture by stating that the former site originally purchased for a County Sheriffs sub-station wouldn't be adequate for a new Town Hall. This reasoning is in direct opposition to the reason they recently gave Councilwoman Flowers for not selling the sub-station site



The Summerfield Town Manager sees no issue with the park supervisor scratching his initials on town property. What do you think?

when she suggested they sell it. In addition to this new venture, the Town Manager suggested that if the town acquired a new ten acre site, it would be adequate for a "police station and public works facilities."

This new revelation from the Town Manager comes as quite a surprise especially in light of the following. Over the past two years the Town of Summerfield spent in excess of \$200,000 with consultants and formed a committee made up of Summerfield residents to formulate the recently unveiled and Adopted Comprehensive Plan.

Committee members chosen by council worked countless hours and hundreds of citizens attended the Comprehensive Plan Committee's two open houses. These citizens were given the opportunity to add their input and illustrate their vision for Summerfield. A police station and a government complex were NOT part of their vision. Overwhelmingly, the citizens stated that they prefer that the town government be small and accessible with services limited and taxes kept low.

Further, the committee and other citizens stated that the Town should minimize municipal ownership of infrastructure. This begs the question: why is the Town Manager entertaining a venture contrary to the Adopted Comprehensive Plan since the town just spent \$200,000 to find out what the citizens of Summerfield desired? If the plan is going to be ignored even after it has been approved by council, then why did the Town spend \$200,000 of your money and waste the citizens and Committee members' time? Perhaps the answer is, there is plenty of taxpayer money to spend in Summerfield.

Your Town Manager, with a staff of four, has begun advertising for a new town employee. Contrary to the stated vision of the Comprehensive Plan, the Town Manager at the time of this writing wants to hire a Manager's Assistant / Events Planner. The Town Manager stated that this will be a part-time position and having an "events person" to put on park programs is a "traditional position in the parks and recreation department."

The Park Supervisor's job also started as part-time but quickly turned into a full time position complete with a salary and top-tier health, vision and dental plan, life insurance, pension, and 401K and COLA, with a total expense of \$67,100 all funded with your money. It will come as no surprise to the reader that the Park Supervisor's job, like the Town Manager's job, was NEVER advertised for either. Instead, it was given to an individual with no parks and recreation experience in recognition for being a great town volunteer. I guess you could say there's the right way to do things, and then there's the Manager / Council way. ❖

Prior to running for office, Laughlin was volunteer finance officer on the Summerfield Youth Council – an organization headed by Councilman Williams’ daughter, Kim Jackson, Williams’ grandson, Reece Walker, and Michael Garrett, 2010 candidate for NC house district 62. Responding to concerns about a letter she wrote supporting Garrett’s candidacy, Laughlin explained Garrett’s misrepresentation in his bid for office where he claimed to have served on the board of a non-existent non-profit organization as “the fault of the IRS.” Laughlin has yet to account for bearing false witness in support of Garrett, where she (falsely) stated Garrett had volunteered on Summerfield’s first Founder’s Day Committee.

At the recent 8/10/2010 town meeting, Laughlin led the charge in calling for the dismissal of long-serving, highly competent zoning board volunteer Ken Dunham. Williams seconded the motion. Without any discussion, without providing any reason, Council voted unanimously to dismiss Dunham (Alicia Flowers was not present) from the Zoning Board.

Right after Dunham’s dismissal, the Manager suggested Mr. Dunham be appointed to the Board of Adjustment which is a Quasi Legal board. The council agreed by consensus to ask Mr. Dunham to serve. If the Council and Town Manager think Mr. Dunham is qualified for the Board of Adjustment, one has to question why Council members Laughlin, Wray, Williams and Barnes voted him off the Zoning Board.

Citizens are asking questions about Dunham’s mysterious dismissal. At the Sept 14, 2010 council meeting, Councilwoman Alicia Flowers read an email sent to council from an unnamed resident. This citizen/writer attested to Dunham’s qualifications, impartiality, and professionalism as they had served with him for many years on the Architectural Review Committee for Henson Farms Homeowners Association. In closing, the writer stated a lack of understanding of Dunham’s dismissal, that his dismissal was to the detriment of all citizens, and as a citizen, voter, and taxpayer, the writer deserved an explanation for Dunham’s dismissal. Flowers closed her statement regarding Dunham’s dismissal with, “Unfortunately the citizens of Summerfield are the losers here.”

Councilwoman Laughlin recently stated that dismissing Mr. Dunham would give someone else a chance to serve. If that was her intent, why single out Mr. Dunham when other longer serving members remain on the Zoning Board? Why not inform Mr. Dunham privately instead of public humiliation? Is this the kind of petty treatment a dedicated volunteer should expect from council? ❖

the position is to “support park programming, park events, and the marketing of programming & events.”

At the April 27, 2010 Special Call council meeting, the Parks & Recreation Committee repeated their request for council to add a new, part-time employee position. Besides handling “parks & recreation programming” duties, the committee added, “Committee members were spending most of their time (working) on events and said they would like to get back to making decisions.”

Mayor Brown reiterated Parks & Recreation Committee desire to be a “decision-making only” body at the June 1, 2010 budget open house, saying, “committee members are exhausted from doing all the work and they want to get back to just making decisions.” At the same meeting, Town Manager Michael Brandt added that the position would be unnecessary were it not for the level of event programming demanded by the council and the Parks & Recreation Committee.

Perhaps what so disturbs Barnes is that she has been forced to examine and defend the indefensible. Barnes would have us believe the purpose of the new position is to assist the Manager, but the facts reveal something very different. Barnes, along with council members Wray, Laughlin, and Williams, has again raised taxes during a recession to hire this additional employee. And in their own words, the purpose of the new position is to market and execute plans of a few unelected Parks & Recreation “decision-making only” volunteers. ❖

the Town does not appear to be following its own rules and collecting \$75,000+ in late fees. Having clearly stated how construction delay penalties work and that delay penalties are enforceable, why has the manager NOT enforced these rules? Why did the Town receive a request for contract extension only after the Town was asked to produce evidence that the Manager had properly received & approved timely-submitted inclement weather claims? Are the interests of the taxpayers being protected?

Why are Summerfield’s taxpayers NOT first and foremost with our Manager / Council as we deal with the current economy? Habitually they are blowing \$200,000 here, \$200,000 there, and now are failing to collect \$75,000 penalties owed. Do our Manager / Council officials realize the taxpayers are footing the bill for their wasteful spending and apparent favoritism toward certain businesses? Interesting to note, one council member once quipped, Summerfield is a rich town and the citizens can well afford to pay taxes. Perhaps with this mindset wasteful spending or enforcement of contracts isn’t of much importance to the current crop of leaders, Town Manager included. ❖

\$75,000+ Remains Uncollected by Town

Council silent on issue of Manager failing to collect \$75,000 penalty.

By Dwayne Crawford

Editor

“The contractor has agreed to a \$500/day construction delay penalty beyond the contract period with a provision for inclement weather events,” said Town Manager Michael Brandt, on July 14, 2010. This in response to council concerns about potential delays in construction of Summerfield Athletic Park (SAP). “The way the penalty works is, let’s say the average rain days in August is 5, they account for that in their contract. If it rains 10 days in August, then they can claim 5 days as lost work days due to inclement weather,” continued the Manager, “but they actually have to go through a process and claim it. They cannot come back in October and claim days in August. They have to make the claim when it occurs. They have to prove it rained the amount of claimed rain days. And from there we would either grant it (claimed rain days) or don’t grant it.” One council member responded, “I want to make sure that if there is a penalty, that it can be enforced.” The Manager replied, “There is a penalty and it can (be enforced)...as set out in the contract.” The Town Attorney agreed. Council voted unanimously in support SAP contract with RP Murray, Inc. , specifically citing the penalty clause included as discussed in their motion to approve.

A Phase II extension contract was signed with RP Murray in Sept. 2009, extending contractual completion date for Summerfield Athletic Park to March 15, 2010. When asked on July 13, 2010, about the status of contract penalties, the Manager replied that delays were due to rain, which is an “act of God,” and that no penalties were being pursued. To confirm appropriateness of the Manager’s claim, on July 16, 2010, a citizen asked the Town to produce all timely submitted and approved inclement weather “acts of God” claims received from RP Murray.

To date, the town has yet to produce any evidence that any inclement weather claims were ever submitted. What has been produced is one RP Murray request, dated August 3, 2010 asking for a 185-day extension to the March 15, 2010 SAP contract end date. If the manager is to be believed, then this August 3rd contract extension request from RP Murray would not be necessary.

No one contests that the Summerfield Athletic Park was completed late. What should concern every citizen is why

continued on page 4

Council Disparity in the Spotlight

Membership in Manager / Council fan club has its privileges.

By Dwayne Crawford

Editor

In the first half of 2009, the Summerfield Council was publicly asked on no less than three occasions to put a referendum on the ballot to change the form of government from the current Manager / Council back to Mayor / Council – once on January 10, once on February 10, and again on June 9. Council refused to act thus putting the burden on citizens to collect the required signatures on a petition within one year.

It is interesting to note that on June 12, 2007, when 7 of 32 members of a local organized group supporting the majority tax-and-spend members of council requested a referendum to change from Mayor / Council to Manager / Council form of government, the tax-and-spend council majority was quick to accommodate them.

One should rightly question the disparity in how council treats citizens and their requests. There was no burden to obtain signatures placed on a small organized group of outspoken Council supporters, yet citizens with an opposing view to the council tax-and-spenders were told to go collect signatures. Citizens successfully met council's demand with over 769 signing the petition in under one year. Yet when presented with a board of elections certified citizen’s petition, the council was still reluctant to place the Mayor / Council referendum on the ballot. It wasn't until the town attorney pointed out that council had no choice and the law compelled them to call for the referendum that council reluctantly voted to proceed.

It is easy to understand why the council didn't impose the burden of collecting signatures on certain citizens and yet required signature collection for the rest of us. On June 9, 2007, two council members that approved putting the Manager / Council referendum on the ballot happened to belong to the small organized group requesting the 2007 Manager / Council referendum. Today council is made up of three members of that small organized citizens group: Bob Williams, John Wray and Diane Laughlin. With this current arrangement of representation it's easy to understand why citizens are treated unequally when standing before council. One would hope that all citizens would be held to the same guidelines and standards for the sake of equity, unfortunately that isn't true in Summerfield.❖

THE SUMMERFIELD HAYSEED

PO Box 331
Summerfield, NC 27358

Inside This Issue...

- ❖ Give the Town Manager His Due
- ❖ Nine Months of Laughlin
- ❖ Misrepresented Positions?
- ❖ \$75,000+ Remains Uncollected by the Town
- ❖ Council Disparity in the Spotlight

*Local News and Information
You Will Not Find
Anywhere Else!!!*

THE SUMMERFIELD HAYSEED

Volume 1, Issue 2

October 2010

The Summerfield Hayseed publication is privately owned and paid for by Summerfield Resident Dwayne Crawford

Letters to the Editor, OP-ED submissions, corrections, story ideas, and advertising inquiries should be sent to: Hayseed, c/o Dwayne Crawford, PO Box 331, Summerfield, NC 27358

Disclaimer: Letters to the Editor and OP-ED submissions published by The Summerfield Hayseed do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of this publication. We do not guarantee accuracy of Letters or OP-ED pieces. While we strive to be accurate in our articles, we sometimes make mistakes. Please send us your corrections.

ELECTION DAY IS TUES, NOVEMBER 2

Voting will be held at the polling places from 6:30 AM to 7:30PM

Bur-Mill Clubhouse Early Voting:

Saturday, Oct 23, 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM

Sunday, Oct 24, 12:00 PM to 4:00 PM

Monday – Friday Oct 25 to 29, 10:00 AM to 6:30 PM

Saturday, Oct 30, 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM

THE SUMMERFIELD HAYSEED

On the Internet at: summerfieldhayseed.com

Donations to offset Hayseed printing and postage costs are appreciated. Please send your contribution to PO Box 331, Summerfield, NC 27358