



Minutes

Board of Commissioners Special Meeting

4:30 p.m. Aug. 28, 2023

Board Meeting Room, Town Hall Annex, 105 E. Corbin St.

Present: Mayor Jenn Weaver and commissioners Mark Bell and Kathleen Ferguson

Absent: Commissioners Robb English, Matt Hughes and Evelyn Lloyd

Staff: Assistant Town Manager and Community Services Director Matt Efird, Town Clerk and Human Resources Technician Sarah Kimrey and Town Manager Eric Peterson

1. Opening of the special meeting

The meeting started at 4:47 p.m. A quorum of board members was not present.

2. Agenda changes and approval

There were no changes.

3. In-depth discussion and topics

A. Transportation discussion with GoRail

Christy Sammon introduced herself to board members and staff as a state director of GoRail, a nonprofit group that educates local government officials and community leaders about the public benefits of freight rail investments.

Sammon provided a brief overview of GoRail. GoRail is organized by congressional districts, and Sammon is visiting District 4 to educate local leaders that Congresswoman Valerie Foushee has been appointed to the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and that they can reach out to Foushee with issues regarding transportation. GoRail is concentrating on ensuring that no added regulations are placed on freight rail. Freight rail has been privately held for 40 years, and there is a desire to remain private. From an economic standpoint, this structure has been going well, Sammon said, noting that freight rail reinvests 39 cents of \$1 back into its infrastructure. GoRail monitors federal regulations that may change the logistics or structure of freight rail. Sammon welcomed questions from board members and staff.

Mayor Jenn Weaver informed Sammon that Hillsborough has a railway that travels directly through town and that the town board and staff are very interested in stringent safety regulations. Weaver mentioned that Hillsborough is building a new passenger rail station that will be important to the local economy. The town is also a member of the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization (DCHC-MPO), which is interested in expanding passenger rail. Weaver acknowledged the importance of moving freight for the economy and the interest in balance for passenger rails. She noted that the interface between passenger and freight is a point of curiosity and anxiety.

Commissioner Mark Bell asked for Sammon's thoughts on passenger versus freight rail and for sharing the infrastructure. Sammon said federal law mandates that freight rail must go second and passenger rail first when the rail is shared.

Sammon asked about the planning status for the town's future train station. Assistant Town Manager and Community Services Director Matt Efird shared that the town is at a 30% design level and in the final stages of agreement processes with the North Carolina Railroad and Amtrak to serve the station.

Weaver raised the town's concern for safety and asked for Sammon's feedback. Sammon mentioned that since the incident in East Palestine, GoRail has been making sure people understand that safety is its number one concern and has been educating folks about a mobile app for first responders called "AskRail." Sammon explained that the app provides first responders with immediate access to data about what type of hazardous materials a railcar is carrying in the case of an emergency.

Regarding regional transportation projects, Efird noted that the freight industry could be helpful in terms of advocating for several improvement projects, such as radius, trestle and redundant crossing improvements in and around the town that are competing for diminishing state funds. The improvement projects would benefit the town's passenger rail station and pedestrian safety, and the town could use the freight industry's assistance in advocating for funding.

Sammon referenced an informational packet shared with the group that includes rail-related safety grant information. She pointed out two grants that are the most widely used for a town Hillsborough's size. Sammon advised making the Metropolitan Planning Organization aware that funds are available and that GoRail and/or Foushee could write a letter of support during the application process. Sammon also mentioned another resource on GoRail's website called Rail Grant Hub.

4. Adjournment

The meeting ended at 5:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Kimrey
Town Clerk
Staff support to the Board of Commissioners