



This does not represent a verbatim transcript of the Town Council meeting. Visit www.herndon-va.gov "agendas & minutes" to view agendas and videos. Copies of videotapes of the public hearing meetings are available on request by contacting HCTV at 703-689-2323. Individuals not having access to the town's website may contact the Town Clerk's office at 703-435-6804 or town.clerk@herndon-va.gov.

**HERNDON TOWN COUNCIL
Strategic Initiatives Discussion
Tuesday, February 9, 2021**

Pursuant to Virginia Code Section 2.2-3708.2, as amended; the Governor's Executive Orders, as amended; and in accordance with Ordinance 20-O-23, Continuity of Governmental Operations during Pandemic Disaster (COVID-19), as amended and readopted by the Herndon Town Council on September 8, 2020, which superseded previously adopted amendments, Mayor Olem has stated that the Town Council meeting on February 9, 2021 will be by electronic means. The meeting was broadcast and recorded through Cisco Webex and details for the meeting were made available to the public on Thursday February 4, 2021. In attendance electronically were:

- Mayor Sheila A. Olem, presiding;
- Vice Mayor Cesar del Aguila;
- Councilmember Naila Alam, arriving at 7:24 p.m. due to technical difficulties;
- Councilmember Pradip Dhakal;
- Councilmember Signe Friedrichs;
- Councilmember Sean M. Regan; and
- Councilmember Jasbinder Singh.

Staff present during the meeting: William H. Ashton II, Town Manager; Lesa Yeatts, Town Attorney; Chief Maggie DeBoard, Herndon Police; and Amanda M. Kertz, Chief Deputy Town Clerk.

**February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Amanda M. Kertz, Chief Deputy Clerk, welcomed those listening to the February 9, 2021 meeting and stated that night's regularly scheduled Herndon Town Council meeting was a virtual meeting, which was being conducted electronically pursuant to:

- ❖ Virginia Code Section 2.2-3708.2, as amended;
- ❖ the Governor's Executive Orders, as amended; and
- ❖ in accordance with Ordinance 20-O-23, Continuity of Governmental Operations during Pandemic Disaster (COVID-19), as amended and readopted by the Herndon Town Council on September 8, 2020, which superseded previously adopted amendments.
- Proper notice of the electronic meeting was provided in accordance with the Code of Virginia;
- Agenda and meeting materials, along with information for viewing the meeting and submitting comments for the record are available on the town's website; and
- Electronic meetings will begin with a roll call to determine a quorum and all votes, including adjournment, will be by roll call vote.

CALL TO ORDER

1. Roll Call & Confirmation of Quorum

Mayor Olem called the February 9, 2021 Town Council meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and asked Chief Deputy Clerk, Ms. Kertz, to call the roll for attendance. Mayor Olem asked each member of Council to respond by clearly stating their name and indicating they were present.

Following the roll call for attendance, Mayor Olem confirmed there was an electronic quorum present that evening. All members were present electronically, except for Councilmember Alam, who was late arriving due to technical difficulties, and with Mayor Olem presiding.

**February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mayor Olem stated that she had spoken to several members of Council about a hard stop time of 10:00 p.m. that evening, which Council would try to meet. After asking for Comments for the Record, Mayor Olem also extended her appreciation to the Department of Public Works (DPW) crews for their work in the town.

COMMENTS FOR THE RECORD

Mayor Olem asked Ms. Kertz whether she had received comments for the record on the item listed on that evening's agenda, and Ms. Kertz stated that the Town Clerk's office received comments which were entered into the record and provided to Council.

TOWN MANAGER PRESENTATION

2. Strategic Initiatives Submitted by Council Members

Mayor Olem recognized William H. Ashton II, Town Manager, to resume the Strategic Initiatives Discussion that Council began on February 2, 2021 with his presentation dated February 9, 2021 which is on file in the Town Clerk's office.

Mr. Ashton thanked Mayor Olem for mentioning DPW in her announcements, and he also extended his appreciation for them. He stated the meeting that evening would be on YouTube as they piloted a possible, future means of further connecting with citizens. He stated they had been testing that during the day and that night.

Mayor Olem stated that Councilmember Alam had joined the meeting at 7:24 p.m.

Mr. Ashton provided a recap of the topics sent to him by Council for their strategic initiatives, as provided in his PowerPoint. This included Transparency, Inclusion, and Reform. He indicated that night they would look at Long-Term, Fiscal, and additional topics submitted by Council over the past week.

Long-Term topics included: updating the 2035 Vision and taking a long-term look at CIP items.

Transportation topics included: reducing cut-through commuter traffic and investing in closing gaps in pedestrian and bicycle routes (even where no developer funding was available).

Mayor Olem asked for comments/discussion on the 2035 Vision update.

**February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)**

2035 Vision Update

Councilmember Friedrichs stated she read the 2035 Vision and was interested in hearing others' thoughts on what was missing.

Councilmember Singh stated he had not read the 2035 Vision but was generally familiar. In his opinion, there were pressing things such as boxes sitting around and waterways that could be developed. He thought these were immediately affecting the town/residents and mentioned discussion on those topics included in the agenda. He reiterated that he had not read the 2035 Vision, but he felt there were things that had not been completed or discussed. He was concerned with things immediately affecting town residents and felt those issues should be addressed.

Vice Mayor del Aguila felt the Vision was "a lot of hyperbole." He felt there were no metrics to define success. He referenced "Herndon would be a diverse place where everyone would be proud to call home" and asked what that meant. He felt that, without focused supporting items to measure progress, there was no point in having the Vision. He stated they needed tactical and operational items and what they were doing at the Strategic Initiative Discussions would change the Vision. He wanted tangible, measurable items to come out of the meetings. He also asked how they would measure achieving the Vision, even if it did not change. He felt that would dictate and drive Council's behavior and decisions. Vice Mayor del Aguila reiterated the importance of having measurable, tangible items for each section of the 2035 Vision.

Councilmember Dhakal thought the 2035 Vision itself was good, but he agreed with Vice Mayor del Aguila's questioning of how they would get there. He wanted to add being financially sound to the Vision because that was missing. He suggested setting a roadmap for the Vision, and he mentioned specific ways to achieve the goal of celebrating diversity. He felt the purpose of the Strategic Initiative Discussions was creating a roadmap to achieve goals. He felt the Vision itself was great, but he reiterated they needed to know how they would get there and define it. He emphasized wanting to add financial soundness and sustainability components, which he felt were at the heart of the other aspects.

Councilmember Alam expressed support for the Vision 2035 Plan.

Councilmember Regan did not have any comments at that time.

Mayor Olem provided comments on the history of the Vision and ways the town works toward different goals. She mentioned the great volunteerism in the town being slowed by COVID-19. Mayor Olem also mentioned various ways goals of

**February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)**

the Vision were being met and thought they could look at how town staff attributed things they have done to the goals of the 2035 Vision. She then asked Mr. Ashton to recap this section.

Vice Mayor del Aguila indicated he had a comment before Mr. Ashton responded.

Mayor Olem again asked Mr. Ashton to recap the section.

Vice Mayor del Aguila reiterated he had comments.

Mr. Ashton responded to Mayor Olem's request for him to recap by stating they could encapsulate it after they finished the whole bucket like what they did last week, with her indulgence. Mayor Olem agreed.

Mayor Olem asked for comments on transportation.

Vice Mayor del Aguila stated he was still discussing the 2035 Vision and one of the pieces in the Vision said, "town employees are empowered to provide customer service that exceeds expectations." He asked how that was being measured through feedback, ratings, or criticism performance metrics. He also asked what exceeding expectations meant and how it was measured. He indicated he was fine if everyone thought it was okay, but he felt that it needed "meaningful, tangible items."

Mayor Olem asked Mr. Ashton to tell Council how staff and the town was already doing this by evaluating staff, recognizing staff at organizational meetings, and through other means.

Vice Mayor del Aguila said he was talking about something completely different. He asked, if they say they were going to deliver service that exceeds expectations, how they would know.

Mayor Olem asked Vice Mayor del Aguila to let Mr. Ashton respond.

Mr. Ashton stated there were things in place, like a customer service survey every few years, but there was always room for improvement. He also mentioned that doing one every year had become a lot, and they were due for another soon. He mentioned the Customer Service Awards given to staff and stated they routinely received letters from residents about a town staff member going above and beyond to help customers. There were also quarterly customer service awards where employees get a certificate and a personal note of thanks from him. Mr. Ashton then highlighted awards given at the holiday luncheon where an independent panel of business leaders in the town choose award recipients. For those chosen, there were cash awards and certificates associated.

February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)

He felt something they were hitting on was having no waypoints for their distant goals in 2035, and there was a need to establish strategic goals and possibly to make five-year goals. He felt there were good things in the Vision, but they had not set intermediate goals. Rather than updating the Vision, he thought they should spend more time on the intermediate elements to monitor progress. He provided personal anecdotes about using waypoints to get to the destination, and he felt that could go a long way.

Councilmember Dhakal felt Vice Mayor del Aguila brought up a good point. He asked how they measure and quantify. He referenced “Celebrating Community Spirit” in 2035 and asked how they will say they accomplished this. He expressed support for a roadmap and splitting goals into small, tangible action items they could measure. He asked what their criteria would be to establish those, and how they would say they achieved their goals. He wanted them to build more measurable, achievable, and timebound goals. He thought it was hard to say they achieved high level objectives and they needed comparison and actionable items.

Councilmember Singh said he had a building with maybe 15 tenants, and he was there when they needed a problem solved. He said he did things himself and over the last 10 years, when on Council twice, people came to him because he responded, and they told him he was the only one who did. He thought he worked full time two years servicing various aspects. He thought there was something strange in customer service, which in his view, meant taking care of the customer when they need them. He felt if someone did something well and they got an award that meant nothing, and the context of customer service in the town needed to be defined as well as goals such as responding to needs. He did not feel customer service had changed.

He said it was “great that Lisa Merkel had the marketing strategy... but whenever [he] wanted to do something she interfered and said, ‘this will not be done.’” He indicated his last comment was that people used to know who picked up trash, and he felt the attitude used to be different. He supported Vice Mayor del Aguila and Councilmember Dhakal’s comments. He wanted the goals/posts moving forward but he hoped they listened to his comments and knew how and why goals were set before setting them.

Long-Term

Councilmember Regan provided comments about bicycle and pedestrian studies with PBAC. He mentioned places on routes with gaps for a distance. He said these gaps were, largely, legacies of development and byproducts of a lot of these paths coming when a property is developed. He wanted to see Council fund some of the sections blocking access and thought this had community value.

February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)

Councilmember Dhakal gave an update on long-term regional efforts to reduce cut-through traffic with HB 1832, in the Senate of Virginia at that time, about the Greenway Dulles Toll Road and making tolls more reasonable. He felt this would benefit Herndon and that the current entrance fee to the Dulles Greenway was outrageous and contributed to the cut-through traffic. He also opined that cut-through might be from changed patterns caused by the pandemic. He indicated the bill he was referencing passed unanimously in the Virginia House of Delegates. He thought they should support it and felt it was relevant to this topic, so he wanted to discuss it.

Councilmember Singh thought the bill allowed higher tolls for the company running Dulles Greenway and that would increase the problem.

Councilmember Alam inquired about the transportation aspect of the Vision. She wanted more information about the types of transportation being looked at for 2035. Mayor Olem stated she could get her a copy of the 2035 Vision.

Mr. Ashton stated the goal was to develop multimodal transportation and many CIP projects would advance that. He referenced one project underway, the Van Buren Complete Streets project, which had the goal of making better pathways to connect downtown to Metro as well as some stormwater management. He indicated the project's dedication to a multimodal approach. He stated mass transit was provided by Fairfax County, but the town worked closely with the county and played a significant role in determining routes and Metro.

Vice Mayor del Aguila indicated the Vision mentions proximity to Dulles Airport and cultivating a sustainable environment. He brought up electric car charging stations and investigating town partnerships with electric vehicle manufacturers to make Herndon a destination. He mentioned wanting to draw businesses and people to Herndon under the initiative of sustainable environment with solar panel charging stations and electric cars. He asked if they were funding this and if they fit it in the Vision. To Councilmember Regan's point about sidewalks, he added that he wanted to see ADA compliant sidewalks. He felt those were the types of things they needed to look at and that would not be an easy discussion. He reiterated having solar powered charging stations to make Herndon a destination for tech-savvy businesses and travelers.

Councilmember Friedrichs had no comments at that time.

Mayor Olem provided comments about how the town was adding audible light change signals at crosswalks. She referenced one downtown and mentioned other safety aspects of curbs and lighting on the W&OD Trail. She also mentioned some charging stations from the Smart City Project. She wanted to see sidewalk gaps filled in. Mayor Olem indicated that things were being done, and it would be better if certain homeowners had not been able to forego having sidewalk in front

**February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)**

of their homes. She mentioned walking around town with vision impaired neighbors to identify places for improvement. She stated things had been in progress for a while, and she had been watching the Van Buren Complete Streets Project with excitement as they put the new electrical poles in. She asked Mr. Ashton if he had enough Council input.

Mr. Ashton felt he had a starting point and indicated they could return to transportation later.

For the long-term, regional effort to reduce commuter cut-through traffic, he was unsure of when their last traffic study was done and suggested costing one out to identify problems and inform them on mitigation strategies. He indicated they could assess funding critical gaps regarding the pedestrian and sidewalks conversation and create a CIP project around that topic. He also indicated that an ADA compliance project was possible. Mr. Ashton clarified that the charging stations were worked on pre-COVID and had been decided on in the Fall of 2018. They had been piloting a power charging station at the (Herndon Municipal Center) HMC. He indicated they had no data since the pandemic began, but he anticipated further into COVID-19 revival, they would return to it.

Mr. Ashton requested Council feedback on the CIP projects that would be presented and what they would like to see moving forward.

Mayor Olem also mentioned Wi-Fi in the downtown. In January 2020, they sent a resolution for five-year review of the Town of Herndon 2030 Comprehensive Plan, but the pandemic brought that to a stop.

Mr. Ashton then outlined additional submissions from Councilmembers for discussion that would go into buckets they already discussed. The additional submissions included: multicultural outreach (inclusion) especially outreach about phone scams, recognition of Islamic holidays, changing Council terms, and street parking issues (operational reform).

Multicultural Outreach and Inclusion

Councilmember Singh mentioned not only Islamic holidays, but also independence days for Pakistan and India. He thought communities could celebrate multicultural holidays together and the Multicultural Board could decide how to best to do that.

Councilmember Dhakal discussed multicultural outreach to educate people on phone scams. He would like to see Islamic holidays recognized to celebrate cultural diversity as much as possible. He recommended investigating different cultures and holidays to celebrate and recognize.

February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)

Councilmember Friedrichs asked if Town Attorney, Lesa Yeatts was available. She indicated that she and Councilmember Alam spoke about celebrating religious holidays, as well as scams people fall prey to. She indicated Councilmember Alam shared that the Commonwealth Attorney's office has put together documents they could use.

Councilmember Friedrichs then voiced concerns about religious celebrations. She thought they were run by nonprofits, and she indicated that she mentioned Ms. Yeatts because she felt they should stay away from any religious celebrations as a town. She supported celebrating and nurturing those holidays, but she did not think the town should.

Vice Mayor del Aguila stated he wanted to comment before Ms. Yeatts. He asked who put the Christmas wreaths up in town, and Mr. Ashton responded that the wreaths were put up by DPW. Vice Mayor del Aguila said he wanted to understand how they could put Christmas wreaths up, but people did not want to acknowledge some interfaith event through multicultural outreach. He did not think it was an issue of legality and they, as a town, could decide what celebrations or displays would look like. He thought, if they have Christmas wreaths put up by DPW funded by taxpayer dollars, it was okay to explore—not just Islamic—but all religious interfaith celebrations. He restated he did not think it was a legal question and that he wanted to get his opinion in before Ms. Yeatts spoke.

Ms. Yeatts, responding to Councilmember Friedrichs and Vice Mayor del Aguila, stated the Constitution of the United States tells them there is a separation between church and state. She indicated that certain things have been recognized by the Supreme Court of the United States as religious symbols. She indicated holiday trees and wreaths were not religious symbols, but mangers and things like that had been recognized as religious symbols. There was plenty of room within existing court cases to allow for celebration of other cultures. She thought they were hearing consensus around finding out what those things were. She stated there were bright lines as far as certain religious symbols that could not be supported by government.

Mayor Olem referenced various decorations around the town and indicated she had never noticed a religious tone. She said she had seen no mangers, except on people's personal yards. She had also spoken with Councilmember Alam about phone scams and shared she got that scam herself about an electric bill. She reiterated they needed to be on the lookout for scams and asked Councilmember Alam to address this point.

Councilmember Alam stated many community members either did not speak English or English was their second language. She indicated many had fallen prey to scams and lost several thousand dollars and that they were unaware they

**February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)**

needed to call the police. She said they should inform them that the calls are illegal and should be reported to the police.

Councilmember Regan stated, for recognition of various cultural holidays, they could probably acknowledge them without being supportive of a certain religion. He felt there was probably room in grey areas to show support.

Councilmember Dhakal responded to preceding discussion about religious holidays. He wanted to clarify his understanding and provided personal information about coming from a different religious background and culture. He shared that he had seen, from various states and counties, Diwali recognized and proclaimed by jurisdictions. He indicated he was unsure if it was recognition of religion or culture, but those are intertwined. He felt there may be room to operate and indicated he would do his due diligence. He also wanted to investigate providing recognition through proclamations and cultural festivals, if they could not celebrate.

Council Terms

Councilmember Singh stated that, as Mayor Olem knew, in 2016 or 2014 people were clear they did not want four-year terms and did not want them serving more than two years. He thought staggered terms were attractive and indicated that, in some towns, Council chooses the mayor. He said some have their mayor for only one year and in four years, four people would get to be mayor. He thought they may need a different system and that many people on Council wanted to be mayor.

Mayor Olem recalled people being adamant about having no four-year terms.

Councilmember Dhakal wanted to discuss both terms and term limits. He said he discussed with some Councilmembers and asked Mr. Ashton to add the topic as an agenda item. He said it was a hot topic, and he wanted to recognize interests. He shared that he was just a collector for the information.

He felt they could discuss Council terms being three or four years and that five years passed since it was last discussed. He wanted to have the discussion again because demographics and interests may have changed. He felt two-year terms were too short and could set priorities back because Council may not agree with priorities from a former Council. He felt to ensure completion of goals, they needed four years and two years was a short time to accomplish anything. He also mentioned combining the experience with new Council ideas in staggered terms. He mentioned term limits and felt people may not want the same people running for Council for 20 years. He thought they should allow for new people and ideas. He reiterated it was a hot topic and he understood there were opposing voices, but he thought it was time to discuss it again.

February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)

Councilmember Regan recalled a topic from their last discussion that he was not sure he supported but did support discussing. He indicated that was how he felt about this, although he thought he may agree with some of it. He indicated that he wanted to know how residents felt and that he vaguely remembered past discussion about this topic. He also discussed the timing of budgets and how the Council that created them could be out of office when they were enacted. He expressed concern that to pass a budget that extends past their term was ineffective. He assumed people wanted to live with the ineffectiveness of it and reiterated he supported a discussion.

Vice Mayor del Aguila supported discussing and from a budget, planning, and prioritization perspective. He referenced a conversation he had with Councilmember Regan when he was still a candidate about how, during the first year on Council, it was not their budget. He was fully on board from the perspective of budget planning. He felt there were concerns when people were in for four years who might not have a progressive or agility-minded mindset that he thought the town needed. He felt there was a lot of resistance to change and in talking to people everyone thought it was fine. He said reform is “disruptive and transformational” and thought two years was long enough to get a sense of someone and move them out. He restated he liked it from a budget planning perspective. He said Congress runs every two years, but like Councilmember Regan said, it was inefficient. He felt they only had one chance to get their priorities right.

Councilmember Alam agreed with Vice Mayor del Aguila’s comments.

Councilmember Friedrichs indicated she had always been in favor of four-year terms, but as others said, citizens were not. She felt most projects took a lot of time, and when there is a lot of change you can get into a project and then have it pulled. She referenced the impact this had on businesses.

She felt every two years they spent money fundraising and contacting people, but an upside was talking to citizens and getting feedback. She expressed it could be tiring but also kept them accountable. Councilmember Friedrichs liked the idea of staggered terms from a continuity aspect, and she felt they may need continuity on Council so people who helped with something could continue. She reiterated she was in favor, but she did see the downside of having someone in office longer. She also stated that being progressive or wanting change was up to the voters; term length would not change that.

Mayor Olem spoke about how Council was elected in May in the past, and they would have to go through a full year with another Council’s budget that had just been set for a year. She said there was good and bad either way and that, presently, new Councilmembers jumped right into the budget in January and had to get up to speed.

**February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)**

Street Parking Issues

Mayor Olem indicated neighborhood streets are public, and people can park there legally.

Councilmember Dhakal stated this was another topic that came from the public during campaigning. He referenced street parking issues in his old neighborhood. He said many cars were parked over nights and weekends. Residents indicated many owners of those vehicles do not even live in the town, and many leave their vehicles over the weekend and pick them back up for work. He supported residents' rights to park in their street and asked how they could minimize parking abuse. He felt Metro would exacerbate the issue. He understood there may be legal issues and was curious about ways to distinguish town and non-town vehicles. He asked what other jurisdictions used that could be a model. He reiterated the issue worsens every year, and he wanted to find a solution.

Vice Mayor del Aguila concurred with Councilmember Dhakal. He mentioned seeing out of state plates and how, if they live in town, they should change their registration. He felt people may not be changing registrations to avoid paying the Commonwealth, county, and town which could be an untapped source of revenue. He also touched on parking abuse in terms of duration and taking multiple spaces. As they approached Metro going live, he thought this would worsen. He wanted to be proactive and start doing something that day.

Councilmember Alam said she met many residents who mentioned construction trucks and delivery trucks making it difficult for their guests to park. She agreed with Councilmember Dhakal about people leaving their vehicles in town and picking them back up for work.

Councilmember Friedrichs agreed they needed to do something. She provided comments about visiting her mom who lives in Herndon Harbor House and about cars parked on a street with an empty condominium parking lot making it difficult to navigate the streets. She wanted to see a Draconian approach to this like what was done on Old Hunt Way where people had been parking and abusing parking. She supported her colleagues' comments.

Councilmember Singh supported Councilmember Friedrichs' comment. He thought certain roads like Park Avenue were always full of cars, and people were afraid to visit people due to having no place to park. He was unsure of the solution, and he was not talking about people from out of town. He felt it was terrible in many neighborhoods in the town and perhaps they should have a study done. He expressed support for effort in this direction.

Councilmember Regan had no additional comments.

**February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)**

Mayor Olem added that if someone had out of state tags and were in the military they did not have to change, but if not, the Virginia DMV did have a way for people to report. She referenced Councilmember Friedrichs' mention of how they worked on some issues with Old Hunt Way through parking permits. She indicated Mr. Ashton does have the authority to work with neighborhoods on issues. She felt Metro parking would not become an issue in most neighborhoods and stated anyone could park in the neighborhoods. She provided a personal anecdote about a car parked in front of her house one winter that they discovered was a stolen vehicle upon calling the police. Afterwards, they began reporting cars to the non-emergency number.

Mr. Ashton recapped this section beginning with multicultural outreach. He indicated they would need to engage in outreach about phone scams with the Commonwealth Attorney's documentation Councilmember Alam was getting. He indicated that recognition of Islamic Holidays would be a good place for the Multicultural Committee to start work on recognizing other cultural holidays and room to operate. He also suggested performing an analysis on how to effectuate changing Council terms and felt, if they truly desired that, they may want to have multiple public hearings as they did the last time it was considered.

He indicated street parking and related topics were something his office dealt with regularly, and he suggested a possible work session discussion item about a possible commercial vehicle ordinance to abate those problems.

He indicated they could discuss the residential parking permit program and Council had changed the program at Herndon High School. He stated, though Council had changed the program, they would still need to enact it through petition signatures which would require community outreach and engagement through a petition to expand. That was Zone One and he had immediately thought that when Metro came, downtown could be Zone Two. He indicated they could also brief Council on other tools. Mr. Ashton shared they had a new Parking Enforcement Official who had just started and was in training. He indicated they could look forward to his input on this as a discussion item and wrap their minds around tools to address the issue.

Fiscal

Mr. Ashton reminded Council they had decided to address the Fiscal topic last and the topics were all sent to him by Council.

The topics listed on the first slide included: undertaking effective short- and long-term budgeting to match immediate and long-term priorities without overburdening future residents. Focusing on vital services such as trash and recycling, road maintenance, repair, water and sewer, and police functioning. Avoiding

**February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)**

raising taxes if possible, protecting staff from layoff, if practicable, and utilizing reserves to offset budget shortfalls.

Mayor Olem asked for discussion on the first bulleted topic. There were no comments, so she moved to the second topic.

Councilmember Dhakal indicated he wanted to talk about the first topic but was waiting for discussion from whoever submitted it. He wanted to know what the specific discussion priorities were.

Mayor Olem asked him to address the second topic since no one had raised their hand to discuss the first.

Councilmember Dhakal asked again if anyone could elaborate.

Mayor Olem felt that since they were still in emergency mode, they needed to focus on vital services. They had all heard of cities having trash strikes and things could get hazardous quickly. She moved to the third topic about avoiding raising taxes for discussion.

Councilmember Singh indicated he had comments for the second topic and provided commentary about road maintenance and repair which he said was done in patches. He felt they needed to develop a program for larger sections because patching would be more costly in the long run. He then commented on the Herndon Police Department (HPD) saying he had heard, "...we have too much police, and actually we have too many ... been told by the police officers themselves, because they find their salaries are restricted because the next level is full and those people are not doing anything, and so, we need to take a hard look at what police actually does, and what the outputs are, and what is it that we want to change. The second, some of the complaints came from the police themselves, and the other complaints came from people who know about ... know the fact that we have per ...(county?)...per capita...(inaudible)...were are one of the highest, you know we have the highest number of policemen in the town. So, once again these two things sort of match together, we need to sort of look at that.

And, finally, as for the police (inaudible) concern, I know some Hispanic people, who have gotten many unreasonable tickets, and these are citizens here, and they were really not doing anything illegal, but they...they ended up getting court harassed or held up, or whatever. And they are professionals, they are not some (inaudible) people, you know, "lay" workers or so, the complaints would seem to be legitimate, in fact I do know they are legitimate because those people told me not to talk about them because I might just give out their names and you know some of those people."

**February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)**

Councilmember Singh also commented on taxes for citizens and businesses. He said, "this sort of relates to raising taxes, or maybe incidentals, but I know that I paid taxes on the last day they were due. I took my envelopes for both Fairfax County and Town of Herndon to the post office. And, I got, I was told only by Town of Herndon that my deposits were late. And so, I had been fined 10 percent, even though I can't prove... (inaudible), but I can tell you I didn't get anything from Fairfax at all. And I know that the checks even by Herndon were actually cashed many days later, many days later, so you know in this, in these times of COVID when we are not sure how post office actually works, what it delivers, when it delivers, and maybe some delays were there within the department, but it seems very unfair to pay 10 percent tax when you are not late. And, regarding that also, I know that is it not in December, but...I guess in the July submissions, I was campaigning and there were people who wanted to pay electronically, and that one day, I think it was Friday when the system was down, and when this particular person went to pay on Monday, they said no, you have to pay 10 percent. So, you know, it generates, I can give you the name of the people who complained about that and they can (inaudible), but something...I don't know what Town Manager would say, but I think something needs to be done in these COVID times. I have always believed that 10 percent fine is just the normal, nobody--even banks, who are notorious for charging you fines whenever your payment is late, they don't do that, they don't charge you 10 percent. And, I know even the Fairfax County charges that, but it is something to sort of think about."

Councilmember Singh also mentioned water and sewer rates and felt that if the rates were what people were complaining about and they have been rising too rapidly they need to take a harder look at how rates were set to prepare people and show how they were addressing them. He felt Mr. Ashton needed to provide Council with more information.

Councilmember Regan liked all the topics listed and said he had not been through a budget cycle yet, so he was looking forward to going through these things in detail in his upcoming budget meeting.

Vice Mayor del Aguila stated a lot would be driven by first drafts and versions of the budget. He thought that would fuel more discussion. He asked what immediate needs were and if that required raising revenues. He thought they were in a premature state where they thought they knew what was going on. He felt they were more open "compared to other councils to do things out of the box and being flexible and agile with how they resolve things." He was looking forward to scheduling the next one and reminded them these Strategic Initiative Meetings would be quarterly. They could be flexible and readjust in the next quarter. He looked forward to continued discussion.

Councilmember Alam agreed they should avoid raising taxes.

**February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)**

Councilmember Friedrichs thought the last four topics were hers. She was under the impression they were asked to give ideas of what types of things they would like to see, and given they were seeing, hunger, evictions, and illness at that time, she felt they needed to take those things seriously and not try to frivolously raise money when they knew a lot those initiatives needed to wait a little while.

She mentioned looking at vital services, and she said she did not know if they had the right number of police or the correct water and sewer rates. However, she felt these were the things that mattered to citizens. She said people call the police when someone dies, and they do not want to under or overfund. She mentioned keeping roads in good repair as much as p and indicated that 75 percent of the budget was for staff. She felt they may discover they had more money than expected in March, but at that point, and given what they were asked, she did not feel they should raise taxes on people and businesses. She wanted to make sure they provided services the town was responsible for and tried not to lay off staff. They were in a time of painful life experiences for people with many hardships. She also indicated staff was trained and knew what they were doing. In a time "of plenty" she might feel differently.

Mayor Olem agreed with Councilmember Friedrichs and provided comments about counties, towns, and cities, hurting. She felt their biggest resources were employees and if they laid them off, they would not be there when the pandemic ended. She felt if they did not continue training and add an increase to pay, they could also lose employees.

She provided comments about emergency situations she saw that same day and said they want to have emergency personnel there when they need them. She would also hate to see Fairfax County not fund their firefighters and not have them there when they need them.

Mr. Ashton summarized the section stating these topics directly related to the budget process they would be briefing Council on next week. By the beginning of March, they would give Council budget numbers to have in-depth conversations before the budget went to print. He indicated what was guiding staff right now and that budgets are about choices and how to use resources. He referenced the conversation they would have in March and stated public outreach for comments would begin in two weeks. He indicated they would see what they need to remove and consider tax raises, water and sewer rates, and everything they were cutting to survive. When they started working toward recovery all of that would be part of it.

Then, Mr. Ashton moved to the second page of Fiscal topics that included: implementing best budget planning practices, analyzing town's current financial

**February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)**

health under three scenarios (without capital projects, with downtown development, with all capital projects) and developing a return to “normal” post-COVID.

Mayor Olem recognized Councilmember Singh.

Councilmember Singh said this was his fifth budget on Council, and it was difficult to give advice and know where the town was going. He indicated only a small amount of changes could take place. He referenced his experience with budgets and said this one was difficult because objectives were unclear. He referred to the Vision discussion and said he did not know why they were spending money or where they were trying to go. He felt if this Council had two or three things they wanted to accomplish, he could deal with that, but if they say he must do 10 things over the next two years it was difficult to say what should be shifted. He thought the budget, as it was laid out, was fixed and then divided into many parts so small changes did not show up. He felt they needed to change that to get a sense of accomplishment. He said he would appreciate Mr. Ashton or Council’s comments.

Councilmember Friedrichs thought the plan looked good and agreed with Councilmember Singh about it sometimes being overwhelming to prioritize. As Councilmembers, she felt they needed to do a little more work to read the documentation. She looked forward to seeing what they were up to next week and expressed gratitude to staff.

Vice Mayor del Aguila agreed with what Councilmember Singh communicated. He said, “this council for me...is different than the previous council...we do want to be far more proactive and deliberate and peel back this onion. In the business world, we call this a scab picking. We really get into the priorities of where we want to be, and again, that’s different than prior council.”

Vice Mayor del Aguila indicated they did not need to continue previous practices or priorities from other councils, and they would decide what those initiatives were, and it was overwhelming then but that was the point of discussion at that level. After initial drafts were presented, they would have more topics to make comments or decisions on. He was glad they were having the discussion and wished they would have had this “in-depth” over prior Council. He felt that they wanted to see reform, be proactive, and have more transparency.

Councilmembers Alam and Regan had no comments at that time.

Councilmember Dhakal thought staff needed guidance from Council on establishing long-term goals and they could brainstorm in another session. He thought with listed topics they could prioritize and see what they must have, should have, and what would be nice to have, and could meet with the revenue

**February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)**

shortfall that year. He thought it would probably also give them an idea of what were must-haves and what type of revenue they needed. They could also look at how the pandemic shorted them and how they should move forward with taxes. He asked how they could effectively increase revenue if priorities were not met. He felt they needed a bigger picture and could mutually agree on nonnegotiable topics and see if they could financially support them. He indicated he thought they were doing well before and could use that as a benchmark.

He referenced the Japanese saying “Kaizen” meaning continuously improve. He said, “if you’re not changing, you’re doing something wrong” and thought they could continuously find ways to improve and change. This meant finding ways to do better. He also thought the Council needed to prioritize more in terms of short-term and long-term planning.

Mayor Olem said if anyone had trouble finding things, they could contact Councilmembers for resources and said she frequently shared links and asked people to reach out if they had difficulty finding anything. She thought sometimes when Councils and priorities changed, there were situations where they had money they had to spend, or they would lose. If they sent the money back, they would be at the back of the line for another future project. Community Development (CD) could discuss those situations and what was there with funding resources available they would not want to give up for a short term changing of directions.

Mr. Ashton said as far as analyzing the town’s current financial health they would have advisors bringing them up to date at the next work session. For establishing long-term goals, he referred to earlier discussion about five-year goals, critical first steps, and then backward planning from there. He indicated a “return to normal plan” was already part of the staff level discussions even though it was hard to see at that time.

For this budget season, he encouraged them to hold off on long-term plans until they understood what they were up against in the budget. They were trying to establish contingency in this budget model for, as they develop the goals, if they want implemented could fall into the framework of that contingency going into the next fiscal year.

He indicated that with everything from the past two weeks, staff had a lot to work on, and he would work on a draft plan to put finer points and varying levels of analyses on these ideas to see what Council wanted to pursue or put on the back burner moving forward. He would work on a plan for their next Strategic Initiatives Discussion in three months. He hoped to get a draft of the work plan back to Council in the next week or so and would find a way to get the work plan itself back to them for comment.

February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)

Mayor Olem felt keeping the town's AAA rating was important. She appreciated the discussion and Mr. Ashton's work.

Councilmember Dhakal moved for overall comments so everyone would be on the same page. He thought the two sessions were great, and they discussed many initiatives even though they might not agree. He wanted to make sure these topics would be in work sessions going forward the next three months. Afterward they could take the initiatives further based on feedback, and their next session would be a recap of what they discussed and finding objectives for the next quarter. He felt, without a timeline, topics may be pushed, and he wanted to confirm with Council that what he outlined was the plan.

Councilmember Singh provided comments about the sessions saying, "I think when we developed the whole plan before, there were some what I call the 'red lines,' which are very, very important. This is why I ran for election and those things have been taken out. And I am not pleased at all with that, I don't know whoever made the decision to take those things out and those had to do, for example, one...all of the downtown development stuff. How did the density increase, how did we evaluate the proposals that came in, what happened after that? What happened in my mind, is not 'kosher.' Unless we face what happened during those period, we are not going to move forward. We are going to be, beset with whatever....be set with I believe the bad decisions we make. There was a lack of transparency all the way through, there was giveaway of the downtown land, whether or not you agree with me on that, but that is true. If we don't discuss that, then we are not going anywhere. We can do all the planning we want. Those are things that are going to affect us for the next 10 years or more. So, those things are going to...our only option is four of us, four people here come together, is to make a motion, during either a work session or a public session, where we make a motion to put those topics on the agenda. And so, to me, it was very unfair that this issue, these, some of these things were just taken out. And so, I can tell you what those things are, I had actually some motions ready today to discuss. So, ... (Mayor Olem interjected with "Mr. Singh") ... presentations by the staff, ma'am let me finish..."

The exchange outlined below followed.

Mayor Olem: "I know, but you are getting way off..."

Councilmember Singh: "I am not getting way off, because it is you, or the Town Manager, took those things out without any courtesy of telling us that this ..."

Mayor Olem: "Thank you, Mr. Singh. Mr. Town Manager..."

**February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)**

Mr. Ashton: "Everything in this presentation was directly provided to me by Councilmembers, based on the top priorities, what you all wanted to see, that you emailed to me. I took each one verbatim and put them in here. The only editing I did on this was to combine some similar ideas between two people, everything that was sent to me is here. Thank you, Madam Mayor."

Mayor Olem: "Thank you, okay, so everything was on there."

Councilmember Friedrichs was recognized to speak.

Councilmember Singh interjected and reiterated his assertions that the topics he felt were most important were removed.

Mayor Olem recognized Councilmember Friedrichs once more.

Councilmember Friedrichs indicated she had been going to move to adjourn, but she did want to mention Councilmember Singh's comments were touched on and the plan was for them to not go away they just were not part of that day's discussion. She reminded them that they had touched on his topics at the last meeting in a broad way.

Councilmember Friedrichs moved to adjourn.

Vice Mayor del Aguila called a point of order.

There was no second to Councilmember Friedrichs' motion to adjourn.

Vice Mayor del Aguila said Councilmember Singh brought up a few things he wanted to make sure were set. He said the majority wanted transparency, and if Councilmember Singh was asking for transparency, they should make a motion and take action for whatever supported transparency at a high level. He said they could make a motion at the next work session or public hearing to discuss it. He thought they were getting there, but they pushed things off to the side a lot. He asked when the next quarterly meeting was and said he felt they needed to set a cadence and wanted to be clear these were quarterly sessions for a reason. He reiterated his question was when the next meeting would be held.

Mayor Olem stated Mr. Ashton already answered that question specifically by stating that the next Strategic Initiatives Meeting would be in three months.

Vice Mayor del Aguila said that Mr. Ashton did not address it to his satisfaction.

Mayor Olem stated Mr. Ashton said he would get back to Council with a date and they would get dates and go from there.

**February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)**

Councilmember Dhakal said his original question was if these topics would be topics in work sessions for the next three months. He wanted to know how they would deal with them and for Council to be on same page. He did not think his question had been answered.

Mayor Olem asked Mr. Ashton to recap again.

Mr. Ashton said Councilmember Dhakal's question was reasonable and indicated that each topic sent in on this list was discussed and he took their guidance and intended to take it back to look at and do analyses legal constraints, fiscal impacts, operational impacts, unintended consequences and then deliver back with possible alternatives. He would then bring that analysis for Council to discuss their timing choices for the topics.

He said some topics would not cost anything, and they could be discussion items. Beginning the following day, Judy Fry, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager, was going to reach out about Council availability to accommodate a date. He said a date certain was hard based on schedules, but they could say the next Strategic Initiatives Discussion would be within a day or two of May 9th.

Councilmember Regan had one more ask of Mr. Ashton and indicated he counted 35 items requested. He asked Mr. Ashton to sequence them. He said they wanted to see all of them, but that was not practicable given everything going on. He felt there was a logical sequence to some of them and added he would appreciate if Mr. Ashton could come back with what they should do, and Council could either confirm or push back. He reiterated that he appreciated there was a sequence and other things going on.

Mr. Ashton said he would plan to look at how to space things to analyze and change based on Council comments. He indicated 35 items was daunting, not only because it was a large number, but also because they were dealing with Draconian COVID-19 restrictions on the workforce. They also had day to day jobs. He reiterated it was a large number, and they would try to formulate a plan. He would appreciate input on how to restructure moving forward after Council saw the first draft.

Councilmember Dhakal wanted to take advantage of the time left to have Council retrospect about what they liked about the discussions and format for the next session. Specifically, he wanted them to comment on what went well and what they could do better. He said it was not about the agenda but the process/flow of the two Strategic Initiative Discussions. He thought it went well and they could learn something, and lessons learned could be implemented the next time.

February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)

Councilmember Singh responded saying, "I like Pradip's soothing words, if you would say, but I made it very clear, in the submission I gave you, Town Manager, the rationale for the priorities. And that rationale in your comments is not that different then what you have. You are talking about COVID, I made my comments from that perspective. But there are certain things that need to be taken care of up front. And those were very well mentioned there. I just feel that those are the important things, if we don't align our budgets, and don't...are not forthright with the information we provide, then we cannot have the right priorities.

If we cannot have the faith, if, for example, staff will get up and make good presentation that are efficient for us, or give us the right information, and I can give you, meet you in person, where the information was not correct. And...those ways of working are very harmful to us. And they are very inefficient. And that is where you want to bring the efficiency into the process. That is why I gave a very written, several page, rationale for doing this, and I feel that...that...sort of has been shoved aside, those were the important reasons. And I want to be sure that number one, I suddenly have to talk to three or four or five of us here, who are willing to make a motion, or support a motion to put these items on the agenda. And that is certainly one of the options. I don't want, I didn't want to do that, because I thought you would at least discuss, you know, maybe in the second go around and see what we should have included, but that is not a subject.

So, I don't know, I am not sure, that some of those things that I feel, not I feel, other people feel it too, are important to do. That, in fact, they would be taken out. Because, we do have some people who don't want those things discussed. But those are important you know unless, and we have learned from this national...national government, it is very important to know what the truth is, to move towards the truth, to have those policies that reflect all that stuff, that, those things are important first and foremost. And, that's all I can say. You are wise enough, you are knowledgeable enough, I know some of those things may be very uncomfortable truths for some people here. But, unless we speak the truth, we aren't getting anywhere.

Because we have to have confidence when a staff member gets up, he does work hard, he does the best work – when anybody gets up, where previous town manager, he speaks the truth. Those things are extremely important."

Mayor Olem thanked Councilmember Singh.

Councilmember Singh continued saying, "whatever other people may think, they may not want to talk. Those things must be talked and shall be talked in some manner. That's all I can say. I hope you would put them on the agenda as soon as possible."

February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)

Councilmember Alam was recognized by Mayor Olem but had no further comments.

Vice Mayor del Aguila thought summarizing with what Councilmember Dhakal was asking was part of the growing process and said "look this council is different from previous councils I think you have more business-focused individuals with an eye and a slant toward transformation and agility and if that's not comfortable that okay, we'll all get here but majority of councilmembers and supported by the majority of people who voted for them think this is the way to move forward."

He felt they should take criticism as a "data point" and that they were all there for the same reason and wanted to contribute in a positive way to make the town better. He said they were going to have debates and arguments, but at the end of the day they were working toward moving forward. Strategic planning was a big thing for Council. He loved that Councilmember Dhakal asked what worked and what did not. He reiterated he welcomed all criticism and looked forward to discussion.

Councilmember Singh provided comments about his prior time on Council saying, "...the last two terms on the Council were the most traumatic time of my life. There was a time where the Councilmembers, the entire Council, did not pay attention to anything I had to say. They were ready to isolate at every point and I have worked with the best in the world, they listened to my ideas, I listened to their ideas. But, on the last Council, six of them didn't 'give a damn.'

They didn't care, they bullied, at every stretch...at every stretch of the way, before the elections, during the terms, after the elections, it never stopped, but I persisted. I am not complaining, I persisted. But I am not willing to stand back where people say whatever they want to say, that their words don't mean anything, and they give away the store.

I am not here for my benefit; everybody has an ego. But this is nothing compared to what I have done in the past. But the first time, when people didn't care, well there are people out there in town, who believed in me, who elected me, who read my articles, they know what I am about. I don't ...anyone of the other six people, they don't define me, they can never define me. And, I...if anything I did for the betterment of the town day in and day out. You can never take that away from me. What I am saying is that, that behavior to shut a person out, or shut anybody out, even Signe knows a little bit of that, who has some ideas, who wants to speak, who wants to ask questions, that is what was tough. It was not that we lost, I lost something, it was the people who lost. Cause people didn't get the right information.

February 9, 2021
(strategic initiatives discussion)

People did know what the downtown cost were there... (inaudible)...And that and I can tell you the staff members got up and said things that are astounding, so bold and so bold lies, and...I can mention one of the staff members, one of the Management Team people, okay, I have never seen that anywhere in my life. So, an attitude, that needs to be changed..."

Councilmember Dhakal called a point of order. He indicated the question on the floor was what went well during the Strategic Initiative Discussions and what could have gone better.

Councilmember Singh interjected and asked Councilmember Dhakal not to interrupt him.

Mayor Olem stated Councilmember Dhakal called a point of order. Councilmember Singh began to speak again.

Ms. Yeatts indicated the point of order was correct.

Mayor Olem asked Council to get back on subject.

Councilmember Dhakal stated he did not mean to be disrespectful and directed conversation back to his original question about what went well, did not go well, and what they could improve.

Councilmember Regan indicated he needed time to reflect before answering Councilmember Dhakal's question and would comment later. He was optimistic about the process and eager to talk about issues instead of talking about talking about issues after having spent six hours talking about issues. How they wade through and plan he did not know Mr. Ashton's burden, one of many.

3. ADJOURNMENT

On motion of Councilmember Regan, seconded by Councilmember Friedrichs, and carried unanimous roll call vote by electronic means, the meeting of the February 9, 2021, Town Council Meeting was adjourned at 9:51 p.m. The vote was: Councilmembers Alam, Dhakal, Friedrichs, Regan, Singh, Vice Mayor del Aguila, and Mayor Olem voting "Aye."


Jessica Sizemore
 Legislative Assistant


Sheila A. Olem
 Mayor



Minutes approved by Town Council: April 13, 2021.