



FEBRUARY/MARCH 2021
VOLUME 17 ISSUE 5

CHAPEL HILL TOWNTALK



On the Front Burner

Town Manager Maurice Jones

Our budget team has been hard at work preparing for the Fiscal Year 2021–2022 budget process. Each year we review our Town's needs and revenue projections to develop a budget that reflects our organizational and community values. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant and unusual impact on our budget. For instance our sales tax revenue has unexpectedly been higher than anticipated for FY '21 while at the same

time we have taken a tremendous hit in revenue in areas like Parking and Parks and Recreation. With many unknowns related to the pandemic, developing a budget will be tricky this year. Between now and May, when we present the Manager's recommended budget to the Council for consideration, we will be reviewing the numbers, identifying where we can save money and what projects and programs need more attention this year.

The planning we did last budget season to adjust for the unknowns of the pandemic paid off as the mix of lower expenditures and higher than anticipated revenue made it possible for us to recognize our employees with a one time cash payment of \$800 in February. As we prepare the FY '22 budget we will be examining how we invest in the services our community needs and acknowledge

the great work of our employees. We will provide updates to all of you as we move closer to finalizing the budget.

Recently a question came into "Ask the Manager" inquiring as whether anything aside from COVID was happening in our community. There was a genuine concern that we were spending so much time focused on COVID that we were losing sight of the other great work we're doing. It was a fair question and caught our attention. Please take some time to review this edition of TOWNTALK that highlights the excellent efforts of our employees who continue to provide high levels of service to our residents. All of you are important contributors to our good work and I thank you for your commitment to making Chapel Hill a wonderful place to live for all of our residents.



Best Workplace for Commuters: The Town is among a select group of U.S. businesses recognized by [Best Workplaces for Commuters](#). The Town offers employees exceptional commuter benefits through the Go Chapel Hill Alternative Commute program. For information on alternative transportation, contact Len Cone (Planning) at mcone@townofchapelhill.org or 969-5065 or visit gochapelhill.org.



I WAS STILL SINGING | A DIGITAL HISTORY EXHIBIT

A new digital history exhibit is open exploring the long tradition of Black women making change in Chapel Hill. Learn about their contributions in healthcare, education, and community organizing. The exhibit released a new topic to explore each week in March.

Immerse yourself in Chapel Hill history while honoring the contributions from such remarkable women at chapellhillhistory.org.

Topics:

Meet the Women

Body: Public Health Pioneers

Mind: Black Women & Education

Soul: Community Organizers



VIRTUAL TEAM CELEBRATION

The All Housing and Community Appreciation Celebration was held on Feb. 12. All three departments in the Office for Housing and Community (Affordable Housing and Community Connections, Planning and Public Housing) spent some virtual time together meeting our new team members and talking about how our work has changed over the past year, our superpowers, and new work practices we would like to continue beyond COVID. We also played a group game of Pictionary. It was great to "see" some colleagues that we don't normally see since we're not in the office. Looking forward to our next celebration!

—Loryn Clark (Housing and Community)

Bridge Builder Award

Is presented to

Hargraves Community Center

For being a beacon in the community since 1941. Thank you for enhancing our lives through recreational activities, programs, and outreach to the entire community

*By the Board of Directors of the
MLK Jr. University/Community Planning Corporation
January 17, 2021*

AWARD FOR HARGRAVES CENTER

The Hargraves Community Center received the 2021 Bridge Builder Award. **Phil Fleischmann** (Parks and Recreation) says, "We are proud of the team at Hargraves Community Center for receiving this important recognition and are especially grateful for the efforts of staff, including **John French**, Center Supervisor; **Andre Boynton**, Assistant Supervisor; **Tyrone Clark**, and **Robbin Justice-Jones** who have embraced opportunities to meet different needs during this time just as they do every day."

Staff members were recognized for contributions to the community. In August, Hargraves gave out 215 backpacks and clothes. Staff packaged 20,000 masks to be distributed in the community. For Thanksgiving, Hargraves partnered with Summit Church to give out 83 turkeys, and partnered with Al's Burger Shack to prepare 100 turkey dinners and EmPOWERment to distribute them. Hargraves Center provided showers and personal hygiene kits to individuals experiencing homelessness. In collaboration with the Chapel Hill-Carrboro YMCA and Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, Hargraves has hosted a remote learning scholastic support center.



Briefs



Aquatics Supervisor **Tanner Deisch** (Parks and Recreation) was selected to the inaugural class for the National Park and Recreation Association's 30

under 30. Read more: nxtbook.com/nrpa/ParksRecreationMagazine/february-2021

Katy Fontaine (Transit) has been promoted to Transit Development Manager I. She will help support Matt Cecil as the Project Manager for the North-South Bus Rapid Transit Project (NSBRT). Katy has a Master's Degree in Training and Development from North Carolina State University and Sociology and Psychology Degrees from the University of Massachusetts.

Robert Key (Building & Development Services) is returning to the Town as Commercial Plans Reviewer after six years in Alamance County. Robert holds NC's highest level of inspection certifications in all five trades including Fire. Robert is also a certified instructor.



Congratulations to **Tracey Link** (Parks and Recreation) for receiving a Masters degree in Public Administration from North Carolina Central University. Well done!



Rebecca Mabry (Housing & Community) is our new Housing Officer II. Rebecca's education includes a BS in Justice & Policy Studies, a post-baccalaureate certificate in Nonprofit Management and an MS in Adult Education. She is passionate about social justice, diversity and inclusion initiatives, and economic upward mobility programs.

Alice Mahood (Fire) is the new Fire Department Management Analyst. Alice lives in Chapel Hill with her husband and eight year old daughter. She is a recent grad of UNC's MPA program and is excited to be a part of our team.

Edward "Mike" McGowan (Building & Development Services) is joining our group as a Senior Building Inspector. Mike holds NC's highest level of inspection certificates in Building, Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing and is also a certified instructor.



Homero Plancarte (Fire) and his wife Vianey welcomed their son, Mateo, on Christmas Day at 10:17 p.m. He measured 7lbs. 6.2oz and was 21 inches long. All are healthy and doing well!



Shakera Vaughan (Housing and Community) is our new Community Connections Coordinator. Shakera has worked in the Manager's Office as a graduate intern. She comes to this position with a passion for community and an impressive background in public service.

HOMETOWN HERO VENCE HARRIS

With 25 years already on the job with the Chapel Hill Fire Department, then Emergency Management Coordinator **Vencelin Harris** (Fire) was selected by Town Manager Maurice Jones as the first black fire chief for the Town of Chapel Hill, effective Feb. 3, 2020.

He has served in nearly every capacity at the Fire Department since 1994 from firefighter to fire captain to battalion chief. Little did he know he would be leading the department through a pandemic when he took the helm.



At his swearing in ceremony, Chief Harris was joined by many of the black firefighters that have served #TheCHFD. This week he was honored as WCHL's #HometownHero. Read more at bit.ly/3wc46t0.

And maybe the greatest honor of all is his appearance on #JohnNews. You know you've made it to the big time when John News calls. View John Wortman's interview with Chapel Hill's fire chief and learn about how the pandemic is affecting the lives of firefighters and what they do at youtu.be/cSrvIKxH0lo

EMPLOYEE HOUSING PROGRAM FEEDBACK

Finding housing in Chapel Hill can be challenging and we want to help you! Our Housing and Community team wants your feedback on how we can improve our Employee Housing Program. This program aims to help Town employees find housing in Chapel Hill through Rental Assistance and Home Buyer Assistance programs.

Take the survey at bit.ly/2P7HDwR by Friday, April 9. It won't take more than five minutes.

Interested in applying or getting more information about the program? Learn more at chapellhillaffordablehousing.org/employee-housing.

—Loryn Clark (Housing and Community)

CONFUSED ABOUT PRONOUNS?

Have you ever seen pronouns listed after someone's name and wondered why?

Pronouns are words we use to talk about each other without names, and they change with gender. Using the pronouns someone chose for themselves is a basic way to show respect for them and their identity. Using the wrong pronouns can hurt.

How do you know what the right pronouns are? Don't try to guess based on someone's name, voice or appearance. If you aren't sure, ask. Be polite and direct and keep it simple. That's all there is to it!

Try adding your pronouns to your email signature and including them when you introduce yourself to new people. If we all make a habit of being upfront about it, we'll make fewer mistakes and people of all gender identities will feel welcome and included in the Town.

Have questions or ideas for next month's topic? Email sslayer@townofchapelhill.org.



Getting the COVID-19 Vaccine—Employees speak out

Trying to decide about getting the COVID-19 vaccine? We talked to several Town employees who have recently received the vaccine to find out their thoughts about it. Here's what we heard.

"I am exposed to a lot of people in the course of my work and I have no idea if they have COVID or not. I wanted to keep myself and my family safe. The shot hurt more than the flu shot, but wasn't awful."

"I felt tired afterward for about a day and I had a runny nose."

"I made sure I read up on it before I got it and I talked to my doctor about it. Yes, I was a little nervous. I had a headache, fatigue, and a fever after the shot. That lasted about a day. I feel fine now."

"I got the shot because I want us to get back to normal in this country and we can't do that until more of us either get COVID or get vaccinated. Based on how I've seen people with COVID suffer, I would rather get my immunity from the shot than from the illness."

HRA BEGINS APRIL 5

The annual HRA Drive will begin on April 5.

The HRA will be questionnaire only (no in-person biometric screening). Complete the HRA by June 4 to ensure that cost sharing on your insurance is waived. Here's what you will get in return:

- Information to improve your health
- Cost-sharing contribution for health insurance is waived
- A personalized plan for follow-up based on your health needs & goals

The HRA questionnaire can be completed on the secure online portal at chapelhillwellnessatwork.org. Log in and click on "Click here to start the HRA." If you are unable to log in, contact the clinic for assistance at 919-968-2796.

If you need a paper copy, contact Liska Lackey at llackey@email.unc.edu or 919-968-2796. Return the completed questionnaire to the Wellness Clinic.

Want to be entered into a drawing for a \$100 gift card? Complete the Employee Interest Survey! If you complete the HRA questionnaire on our secure portal, a link will be provided. If you need a paper copy, please print and return the completed survey.

Questions? Contact Liska Lackey at llackey@email.unc.edu or 919-968-2796.



"I know some people are concerned about the vaccine. I was too. But I finally decided this was a safer option than the risk of having long term problems from the disease."

"Once you're there, the process is quick and smooth."

They all had some suggestions:

- Use information from reputable sources to help you make your decision.
- Contact your local health department to be notified when you are eligible to get the vaccine.
- Plan for limited activities for a day or so after you get the vaccine in case you have some flu-like symptoms.
- Continue to take all precautions to protect yourself and others.

Getting the vaccine is voluntary. These Town employees said they are glad they got the vaccine and would do so again. They hope you will consider getting vaccinated when you are eligible to do so.

You can find more information on The Hive thehive.townofchapelhill.org/buzz/covid19

You can access this information from any smart device.

Compliments

Stanley Fearnington (Public Works) was commended by Stephanie Wood. “[He] has been so kind to toot his horn at my 2 and 4 year old boys every Tuesday. It has been a highlight of every week during the pandemic.”

Mack Howell (Public Works) was thanked by Rosemary Waldorf for helping make Old Town Hall usable as an interim space for Club Nova. Mack (and his supervisors) have done an outstanding job of addressing issues in the building.

Latonya McNair and Talisha Saunders (BMD) were thanked by Tim Thorpe (Transit) for their outstanding work when Deborah Garrett (Transit) had a problem with paycheck deductions. Latonya and Talisha provided the highest level of customer service to get the problem resolved.

Meeghan Rosen (Library) was thanked by John Richardson (Manager's Office) for jumping in on short notice to evaluate requirements and manage the submission process for an important grant opportunity.



Matt Cecil, Tim Schwarzauer, and Nick Pittman (all Transit) were commended by Brian Litchfield (Transit) for helping to get solar-powered real-time signs installed at bus stops. The signs show routes and times for the next buses to serve the stop.

Locations were selected by ridership, proximity to community facilities, number of routes served, Title VI considerations, and input from the Building Integrated Communities Committee, El Centro, and Refugee Community Partnership. It's exciting to see this come to reality, especially as we work on ways to improve communications with customers with limited English proficiency.

Antwuan Riggsbee and Orlando Curie

(both Public Works) were thanked by Laura Fenn for being friendly, thorough, and hard-working. “They continue to make and keep Chapel Hill wonderful.”

Sibyl Telfian shared appreciation for **Debra Lane** (Parks and Recreation) who was “so helpful and very professional.” “If Debra is an example of your employees, you are very lucky.”

From Len Cone (Planning): “Hats off to **Tish Perry** (HRD) for her non-stop and faithful work to helping United Way agencies that need so much assistance!” Tish organized the 2020 Combined Campaign, which raised \$18,406 for non-profit organizations.

Eric Andersen (Police) was commended by Amy Vasu for helping with an injured deer. “I appreciate the professionalism, skill, and dependability of all of the Chapel Hill police officers.”

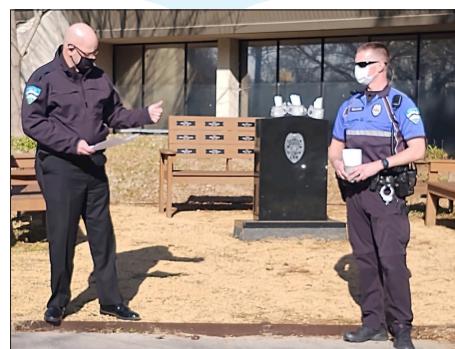
Emma Gordon-Blass thanked the **police and fire departments** for rescuing her daughter when she became disoriented in the fog after sunset and could not return to the Mason Farm Preserve Trail due to high water in Morgan Creek.



Kumar Neppalli and the Traffic Engineering team were thanked by Brian Litchfield (Transit) for installing an RRFB (Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon) at Carraway Crossing and Eubanks, making it easier and safer for pedestrians to cross the street.

Sharon Fisher (Technology Solutions) was commended by Stacey Graves (Fire) for her hard work and dedication. “She always brings a positive, can-do attitude to her work.”

Tanner Deisch and the Aquatics Center Team (Parks and Recreation) were thanked by swimmers. Betsy Conway: “Thank you and your staff for everything you've done to make swimming safe again.” Lauren Hoy: “Thank you so much for all of you and your team's dedication and hard work. I'm always greeted with a smile whenever I walk into the aquatics center!”



Jason Bellevance (Police) was thanked by Yvette McMiller for being a life saver. She contacted the Police Department for a wellness check on a missing employee. He saw that the employee's car was at her home. When she didn't answer the door, he asked the building manager to let him in, and found the employee in shock. She got to the hospital in time to be saved. Jason was also able to connect her family with her.



School Resource Officers **Scott Falise, Stan Newsome, and Traci Donley** (all Police) were commended by Paul Bell (Police) for dedication and service during the challenges of 2020. They have all demonstrated a desire to really pitch in and help their colleagues and the organization through a period of challenges and transitions.



Get Access to Fitness Facilities!

Employees covered by Town insurance who have completed the Health Risk Assessment can get a free pass for Parks and Recreation pools and gyms. A reservation is required for pool use at webtrac.townofchapelhill.org. To get a pass, contact Liska Lackey at llackey@email.unc.edu or 919-968-2796.

Town employees who receive benefits can join O2 Fitness for \$5 per month (add a dependent for \$10 more). You get access to all O2 Fitness locations and free classes (except BOOTCAMP). Get an application at townofchapelhill.org/towntalk or contact **Tom Clark** (HRD) at tclark2@townofchapelhill.org.

Kyle Stuart (Police) began dipping tobacco soon after he became a police officer. He felt it helped him with stress on the job. After getting married and welcoming a child, he became concerned about his health. He also wanted to be a good role model for his daughter.

An employee success story in TOWNtalk inspired him to reach out to the Wellness@Work Program to quit using tobacco. He met with Tobacco Treatment Specialist Barbara Silver. Together, they decided nicotine gum would be the best medication choice for him, and he decided to chew on sunflower seeds and regular gum instead of tobacco. When he felt like dipping, he would go for a walk, exercise, drink water or distract himself by

Lunch & Learn: Become a Protein Pro!

Protein is an essential macronutrient, but not all food sources of protein are created equal. Learn the basics about protein and shaping your diet with healthy protein foods at a Lunch and Learn from 12 to 1 p.m. Wednesday, March 31. Wellness@Work Dietitian/Nutritionist Lana Nasrallah will discuss topics including protein and human health, identifying how much protein you need, and choosing healthy protein foods.

RSVP by 5 p.m., Monday, March 29, to Liska Lackey at llackey@email.unc.edu or 919-968-2796. Liska will send you the WebEx link.

doing something else.

Kyle is now more than 12 months tobacco free! His mouth feels cleaner, he has more energy, he is saving money and happy not to be carrying a nasty spit bottle with him. He hopes being tobacco free will prevent future health problems.

He recommends the Wellness@Work Cessation Program, which gave him accountability and guided him. He also likes the fact that the medications are free and he just received \$200 for being tobacco free for 6 and 12 months!



FREE Tobacco Cessation Program for Town Employees

You can get free medication and support! For more information or to sign up, contact Tobacco Cessation Specialist Barbara Silver at:

Phone/Text: 919-904-4848
Email: barbara_silver@med.unc.edu



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INTERESTED IN HELPING VETERANS?

You are invited to be part of a planning group to assist veterans in using public transportation.

Sometimes it is difficult for those returning after service overseas to use alternative transportation (bus, walk, wheel, or bike). The stimulus (sight and sounds) can be too bright, loud or sudden and bring up memories that they would rather forget. This can make getting to work or appointments difficult. The Town is hoping to develop a transition transportation program for veterans. It would be an ambassador program of sorts with volunteers helping to develop the program with ideas, expertise and heart, as well as volunteers to accompany those needing someone to ride along until they are comfortable using public transportation alone.

Please let us know if you would like to be part of this experience! You can help by assisting with planning, being at a table during an opening event, or being an ambassador. This won't take much of your time, and yet will be very helpful to the community and those who have served our country.

To volunteer, email Len Cone at lccone@townofchapelhill.org. If there are days or times of the week that don't work for you to meet, please include that in your email so that we can work around that.

Thank you for considering being part of the Planning Team as a salute and thank you to our veterans!

TOWNtalk, a publication for and about Town of Chapel Hill employees, is issued monthly September through June. It is printed on recycled paper. Please recycle.

