



# Morrisville Town Council

Special Called Meeting – WCPSS “Small Footprint Schools”  
March 19, 2018, 1:30 P.M.

## 1. Call to order

Mayor Cawley called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. Also present at the meeting were Mayor Pro Tem Scroggins-Johnson, Council Members Garimella (*out at 2:15 p.m.*), Johnson, and Rao (*out at 2:33 p.m.*). Various staff members were in attendance. Wake County Public School Board Members Bill Fletcher (District 9) and Kathy Hartenstine (District 7) were also in attendance. Jeanne Hooks/Assistant to the Town Manager, served as recording secretary.

*Council Members Schlink and Windle were unable to attend.*

## 2. Discussion Items

### Small Footprint School Discussion with Morrisville Town Council Members and Wake County Public School Board Members

Mayor Cawley welcomed guests and citizens in attendance. Introductions were exchanged. Mayor Cawley opened the discussion by stating that meeting educational needs in the community was becoming increasingly difficult. He further explained that Town Council and staff were eager to discuss effective means to share information and ideas on strategies and opportunities to grow with Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) District representatives, and to carry the message forward to the WCPSS Board.

Representatives Hartenstine and Fletcher shared some of their history and indicated a strong interest in working with Morrisville. Each highlighted how exciting it was as the first opportunity to engage in such a planning discussion together between Town elected officials and WCPSS Board members to seek different approaches to meeting community needs.

Council Members individually expressed their appreciation to all in attendance and emphasized their primary interest in reducing barriers and finding best-case scenarios for Morrisville relating to new schools.

The group discussion focused on identifying opportunities within ordinances/building codes and other formulaic assumptions that could be modified over time, to create some flexibility in how a school of the future might appear with a different building strategy. A different strategy could require affordable housing, mixed use and site control. Wake County was exploring the viability of comingling schools with other compatible development types. It was acknowledged by the group that part of the challenge identified was the current footprint size of a traditional middle or high school, in conjunction with high land values, that were driving the need to think creatively to develop alternative solutions. Typical standards for high school sites require 45 net usable acres.

School Board Members recognized an historic shift about 12 years ago in building strategy that became necessary as land values grew. Building up was encouraged then as a viable solution and current examples exist today where that approach has worked well. However, certain restrictions were explained during the discussion relating to service to kindergarten and first grade, which created limitations with building up for elementary schools.

The conversation examined other potential options such as Urban or Theme schools. It was shared that such school types have smaller footprints, but require flexibility with regulatory restrictions such as landscape buffers, stormwater retention, infill or redevelopment of abandoned sites to become workable solutions. There are trade-offs with smaller scale school types, each posing some academic uncertainties and program limits (i.e. athletics) that must be clarified and understood.

An overview of WCPSS's seven-year planning cycle was shared, in addition to types of pertinent statistical data used for long-term forecasting and site selections (i.e. live birth data, employment statistics and other demographic data).

Council Members asked how the Town could best help to provide information and data about how people are populating our housing stock as it is constructed. The Town currently provides data annually both at the certificate of occupancy level and at the parcel creation level to Wake County. It was agreed that the point of construction was too late. Staff offered to provide that data every six months. There was a strong interest expressed in better understanding the formula used in calculating feeder patterns for school placement. Great concerns exist within the community relating to quality of life issues with busing distances and duration of time. Staff explained how the average rate of growth in household size calculator was unrealistic in comparison to Morrisville's level of density and growth. In 2010, the size base per household was at 2.43, 2013 was 2.7 and in 2018 Morrisville is 2.86. Significant changes have occurred over that seven year forecast period. The Town Unified Development Ordinances provides for flexibility rather than regulatory barriers by designating elementary, middle and high school use in regional activity centers, encourages mixed use and does not define a breakdown. There was consensus to review formulas and jurisdictional data to be proactive in the demand for effective planning. It was noted that Morrisville's positive land values generates a fair portion of tax dollars annually for Wake County.

Discussions briefly touched on the distribution and purpose of Lottery Funds to pay for debt to build schools, explaining the annual debt limit of \$10 million in North Carolina. Additionally, the group spoke about alternative funding models that should tie funding to growth as well as a bill currently in the General Assembly, for a state school bond referendum in November. The expected distribution has Wake County ranked on the lower end to receive funds, due to its ability to pay. With 85% of the General Assembly as rural based, changing that distribution toward more urban areas would be doubtful. It was clarified that no municipality or school has authority to charge impact fees for schools based on current legislature.

The group discussed growing concerns from the public. The transient nature of Morrisville's demographics is becoming prevalent and poses a real concern to Council. In addition, concerns were shared relating to core neighborhoods getting bumped, redistricting challenges and capped schools. Practices in years past were identified using satellite models to mitigate some of these similar concerns. The circumstances around school planning are dynamic and fluid as elementary populations mature within a community, requiring more creative solutions to move forward.

Council expressed that Morrisville has shown the willingness to be a model of new ideas and dynamic means of meeting resident needs. The group emphasized how important it was for Morrisville to work together with Wake County to secure one of the potential middle and high school locations that have not yet been identified. WCPSS Board representatives offered to outline the steps of how to acquire a new school and the timeline that may take for a school to become a reality. In conclusion, all agreed that these conversations were essential to address the needs for student stability, school proximity and quality of life for the citizens of Morrisville.

### **3. Adjournment**

**MOTION: Mayor Pro Tem Scroggins- Johnson made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Council Member Johnson and carried unanimously.**

Mayor Cawley adjourned the meeting at 2:41 p.m.