



# Town of Knightdale 2021 STRATEGIC RETREAT REPORT





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## PURPOSE

The work of public officials is routinely fast-paced and demanding. This reality is magnified under the high growth pressures and service delivery expectations of Wake County. Therefore, when a particularly important issue(s) demands more lengthy contemplation by a governing body or staff (or both), retreats offer the perfect solution. By setting aside time for a structured discussion away from the normal work environment, decision-makers and administrators can explore issues in depth and exchange ideas with each other in a relaxed environment.

The International City / County Managers Association (ICCMA) recognizes important additional benefits of retreats in addition to being a tool for increasing governmental efficiency and effectiveness:



2021 Retreat Location, Rocky Mount Mills

*“Retreats offer solutions for other situations as well. Sometimes conflict dominates a group’s interpersonal dynamics, and a way to improve working relationships is needed. Sometimes a new governing board needs to become well acquainted in order to work effectively as a team. Sometimes a board wants to get to know a new manager or the local government’s staff better.”*

The Retreat as a Planning Tool. IQ Service Report ICCMA (2001, January)

**The primary purpose of the Knightdale Town Council’s annual retreat is to survey the Town’s landscape identifying key vulnerabilities as well as opportunities for community advancement.**

Vulnerabilities and opportunities may be internal to the municipal organization or external environmental factors. The elected officials express their individual goals and work to build consensus as a governing body. The Knightdale Town Council collaborates with the Town Manager to clearly outline goals with associated target dates for completion. In turn, Town Administration absorbs these goals into the work plans for the applicable department(s) to ensure completion. These goals represent the primary direction in which the town staff’s efforts will be focused in addition to their regular, operational responsibilities. The retreat also offers an excellent opportunity to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the elected officials and town staff.

## KNIGHTDALE STRATEGIC PLAN

**How do we know that we are doing a good job?** This foundational question is important for all elected officials and town administrators to ask themselves. As stewards of the public’s resources and trust, local officials are challenged to continually ensure that they are meeting their expectations. The Town of Knightdale evaluates organizational success through four primary lenses:

- Service Delivery
- Personnel Administration
- Fiscal Stewardship
- Strategic Direction

The importance of strategic direction cannot be overstated in public administration. When done correctly, it transforms today's visions into tomorrow's realities. Strategic planning helps empower our elected body to realize its long-term vision for Knightdale by setting up goals and objectives in a systematic manner. Simply put, it makes the Town's decision-makers take a look at what's going on today, where they want to be tomorrow, and which steps they will need to take to get there.

## **GREAT TOWNS HAVE GREAT LEADERS**

**We cannot have a successful community without political leadership.** A strong elected body for Knightdale is vital to having a great town. They enact local ordinances, determine the allocation of financial resources, adopt governmental policies, establish stakeholder partnerships, and make other decisions that have major effects on the community's well-being. Good governance does not happen by accident. It is the use of appropriate policy and accountability frameworks which enables the Town Council to focus on strategic rather than operational issues.

Good governance is also the *“way”* an organization is led. The Knightdale Town Council is comprised of leaders focused on the Town's long-term betterment, above and beyond any short-term personal gains. Successful local government officials are a mixture of charm and honesty. They possess the capacity to evaluate circumstances and make judgments based on what will be better for the majority of Knightdale's citizenry. Good political leaders are commonly identified as possessing the following skills:

1. Communicate Well
2. Possess Honesty and Integrity
3. Able to Make Decisions
4. Able to Inspire Others
5. Delegate Tasks Effectively
6. Possess Vision and Purpose



While each individual official has his/her own political priorities, an effective governing body can build consensus and maintain positive momentum addressing the business of the Town. **During the 2021 Retreat, the Town Council was asked to identify the key characteristics that define the body.** Characteristics are the qualities of the Council that serve to define the entire body. The following characteristics were mutually agreed upon by the Council and are foundational to the group:

- **Forward Thinking**  
Possess the courage to proactively meet the current and future needs of Knightdale.
- **Appreciative of all Citizens**  
Recognize the value of all citizens. Embrace the rich diversity of our community. Appreciate that all citizens have value regardless of tenure of residency. Cherish the Town's history and heritage.
- **Responsible**  
Recognizing the importance of the roles in which they serve. Understanding that the resources under their charge are finite and require attentive stewardship.

## BAMBOO AND THE ART OF CULTIVATING PERSISTANCE

Given that the role of the elected officials is foundational to a successful community, how does the Town's Administration Department support the elected body and reinforce the importance of their roles? In addition to ensuring the proper operations of the Town, the Administration Department serves in an integral service role to the elected officials. **It is imperative that these administrators are persistent in cultivating relationships with the elected body.** Establishing and maintaining professional rapport assists in the creation and maintenance of good governance. A common analogy illustrating the benefits of this persistence can be found in the analogy of the bamboo gardener:

*“Bamboo roots grow over a hundred yards, and like those roots, so much of the effort expended by appointed leaders remains unseen by most. The best of these folks invest in the capacity of their council year after year after year even when faced with change, either from the ballot box, term limits, or circumstance.*

*They are patient, recognizing that all of the breakfasts and lunches with electeds to help educate them may not pay back immediately. They are persistent and hold to their values and ethics in the face of the pressure of immediacy and instant gratification. And they are courageous: They give the council the credit for successes and accept the criticisms when things go awry.”*

Council Relations: The Faithful Gardener (ICMA, PM Magazine, June 2019)

It's a simple analogy that illustrates a valuable aspect of municipal administration. The key idea is that the gardener recognizes that persistent cultivation establishes the strong root system necessary for growth and success. Bamboo does not exhibit immediate growth as it establishes firm roots. Though once established, bamboo grows rapidly. According to the Guinness World Records, the world record for the fastest growing plant on earth belongs to a certain bamboo species that grows up to 91 cm (35") per day, which is almost 4 cm (1.5") an hour, or at a speed of 0.00003 km/h (0.00002 mph). Bamboo is an amazing plant for the following reasons:

- Grows fast on a successful root system
- Has regeneration superpowers
- Is virtually fireproof
- Is really strong and flexible
- Helps hold the soil together

These characteristics are analogous to good governance. Establishing and maintaining professional rapport is the result of building a firm foundation (i.e. root system) for relationships to grow. It requires dedicated commitment by the elected body and the Town's administrators. It is cultivated in the countless meetings, emails, and phone conversations dedicated to the betterment of Knightdale. This constant communication and subsequent points of contact are the roots of great local governments.



Segano Bamboo Forest (Japan)

The idea of regeneration is rooted in adhering to a strategic vision for Knightdale. The [Knightdale Strategic Plan](#) serves to clearly communicate the message of **“who we are and what we want our Town to be in the future.”** It is built around five, essential priority areas (or Focus Areas) that are vital to

ensuring Knightdale's future. The commitment to this collective vision allows newly elected officials inherit a comprehensive and well-designed plan of action to meet future needs.

Fireproof is synonymous with resiliency. Resiliency is defined as the ability to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions. Elected officials routinely navigate challenging situations in which their final decisions have direct impacts on the citizenry. It is the role of the Town's administrators to provide important information, in an unbiased manner, to ensure the governing body can effectively weigh the trade-offs in the decision before them.

Local government administration requires courage to meet the needs of its citizenry. Elected officials endeavor to make decisions that are in the best interests of the majority of the citizenry, knowing that no decision will satisfy all stakeholders. Likewise, the Town's Administration similarly strives to make decisions that are in the best interests of all employees while maximizing the finite resources at their disposal. Strength is required to deliver public services that augment the quality of life for our community and provide a sustainable workplace for staff. The willingness to be flexible is an important consideration and defining characteristic of strength as well. While strength requires courage and determination, local government administration also requires flexibility. The local government political environment is dynamic and often presents situations in which significant trade-offs are in play. As such, the elected body must adapt to shifting, situational changes to consistently lead well. Likewise, the reality of emerging priorities requires local government administrators to adapt accordingly to ensure the efficient delivery of town services. Embracing shifts in political priorities with a proactive and positive mindset is fundamental to successful local government administration.

Balancing political expectations and the complexities of municipal operations require dedication and professional competency. Put simply, the ability to serve effectively in local government administration is the result of well-rounded professional experiences rooted in career-spanning commitments to continuing education. In order to maintain positive direction while meeting the expectations of the elected body, administrators must possess an empathic awareness of their community and staff. This empathic awareness is a positive benefit of significant tenures in public administration. Navigating the myriad of complex issues unique to local government create a firm foundation of professional instincts. The benefit to the elected body (and citizenry) is the ability to consistently perform in a balanced manner regardless of the issue facing our community.

## 2021 STRATEGIC RETREAT SUMMARY

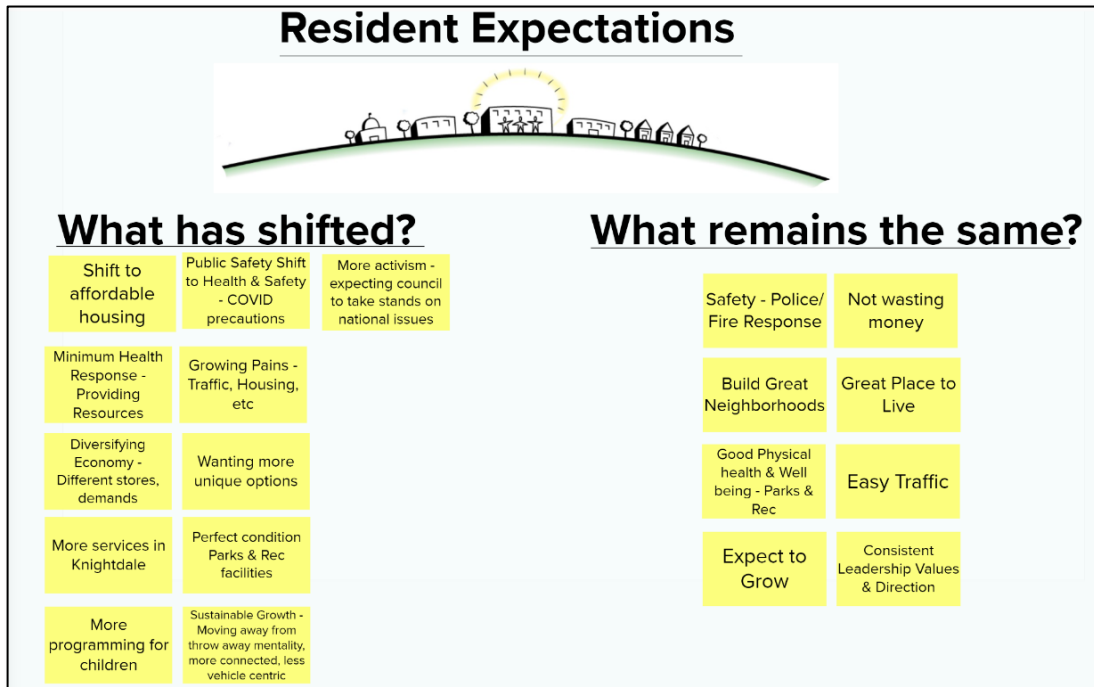
The Town Council convened a one-day retreat to discuss high-level strategic topics facing the Town. This meeting was held on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021, in Rocky Mount, NC.

The retreat was professionally facilitated in-person by Fountainworks and included the opportunity for the Town Council to interact. Discussion focused on open conversation around the crucial issues facing the Town, their connection to the Town's existing strategic plan, and best practices for future objectives and goals. Comments were captured as the conversation flowed.

- **Objectives** - identify and build consensus around key strategic issues
- **Approach** - a facilitated open conversation throughout the meeting, utilizing various exercises to stimulate discussion and engage in open dialogue

## Meeting Context

After a welcome and brief introduction, the Council reflected on Knightdale residents' expectations for the Town, both what has remained the same and what has shifted. Below are the primary themes that emerged from this activity.



### What Has Remained the Same?

- The need for excellent response times from Fire and Police
- Expectation that the Town is practicing good financial stewardship
- Knightdale remains a great place to live
- Good physical health and well-being – ex: Vibrant Parks and Recreation
- Consistent leadership values and direction from the government

### What Has Shifted?

- The importance of affordable housing
- Citizen ideas of public safety now include health concerns – ex: COVID precautions
- Expectations of a minimum health response – i.e., providing more resources for resident health
- Concerns about traffic, housing and other town growing pains
- The demand for more services offered in or through Knightdale
- The demand for more programming for children

Next the Council discussed whether to conduct a community survey to better gauge citizen thoughts and expectations. The Council reached a consensus decision to direct the Town Manager to explore options for conducting a community wide survey. Below are points that were captured that reflected this decision:

- Potential for an outlet for citizens to share concerns
- Citizens currently feel like there is difficulty in contacting Town government

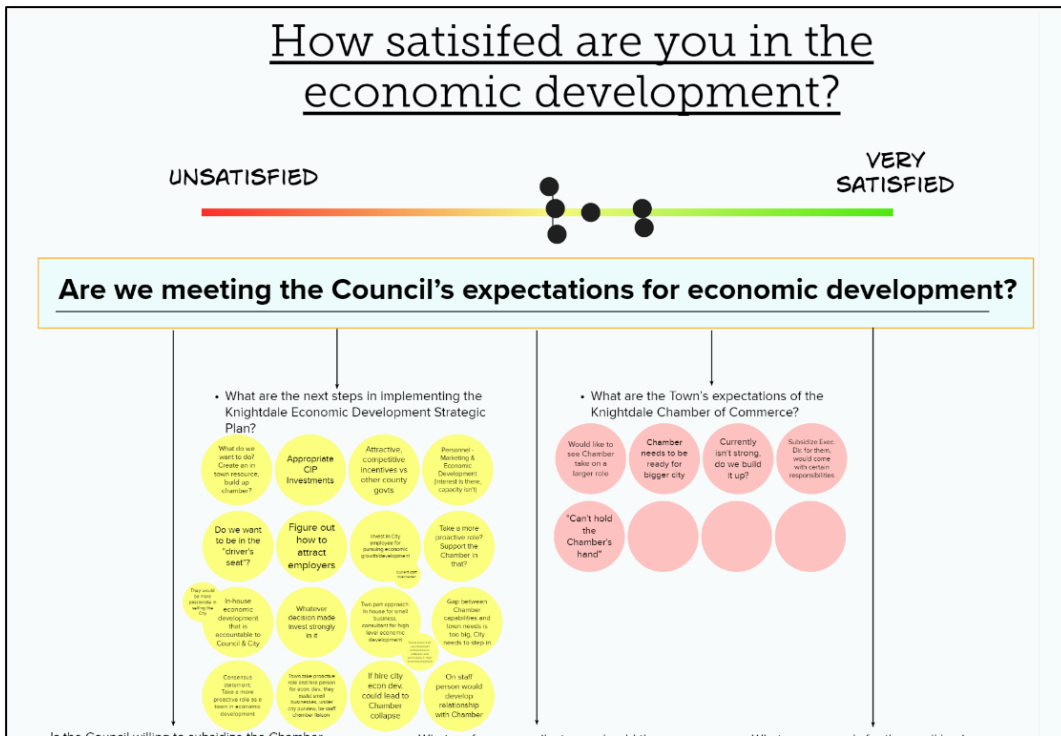
## Economic Development

Next the Council discussed economic development in Knightdale. The central question the conversation was framed around was **“Are we meeting the Council’s expectations for economic development?”** A temperature check was conducted and showed that some Council members were neutral in opinion and a few were leaning towards satisfied. The image below contains the full response.

### Action Plan

- Hire an Economic Development Director for FY23

The Council reached a consensus decision on how to move forward with economic development. The decision was made to research and develop an actionable plan for hiring an Economic Development Director to oversee high-level economic development, Chamber of Commerce relations, and small business development. This approach would allow the Town to take a more proactive role in local economic development. Captured below are the reasons for this decision.



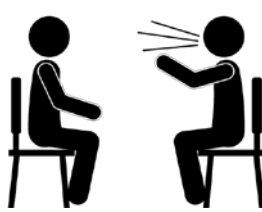
“Knightdale currently has attractive and competitive incentives compared with other Wake County governments”

“Marketing and economic development personnel are currently focused positions within the Town of Knightdale government”

“A need for an individual that can champion entrepreneurs, network, and participate in high level economic development currently exists”

“A gap currently exists between the Chamber of Commerce capabilities and the needs of Knightdale that is too big and needs to be addressed by the Town”

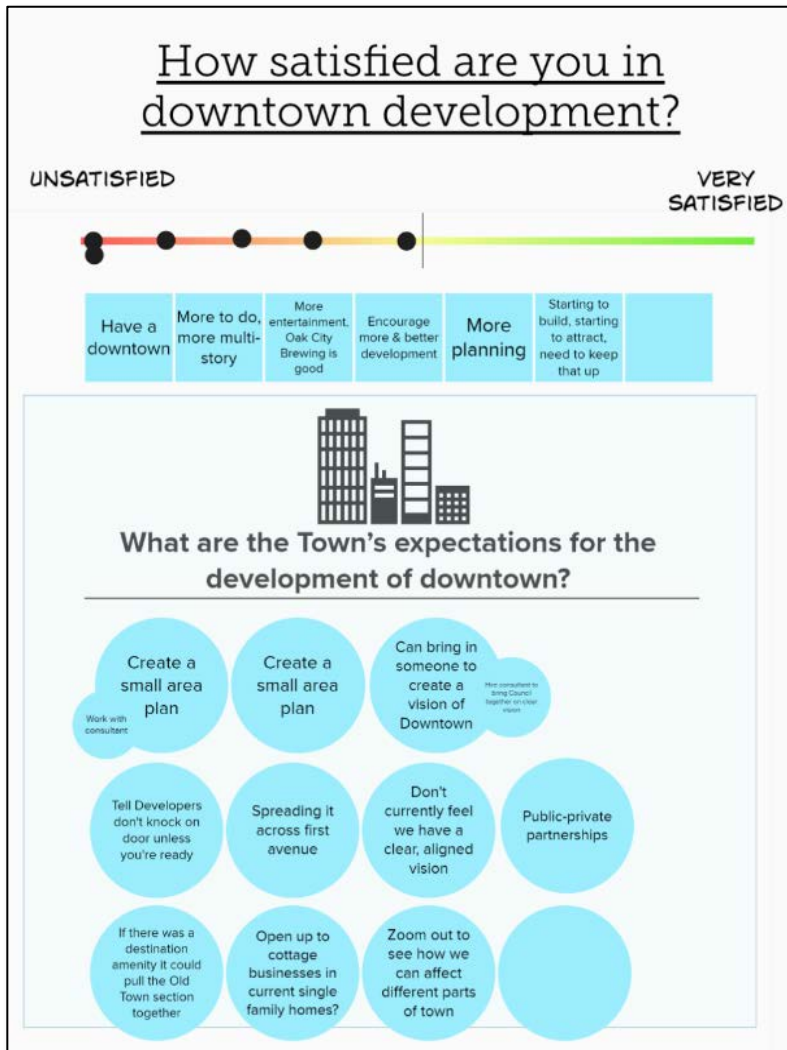
“A Town funded economic development position would need to be accountable to Council and the Town”





## Downtown Development Expectations

Next the Council discussed the development of a Downtown Knightdale. The exercise first began with a temperature check, where the Council was asked **“How satisfied are you in downtown development?”** The response was mostly unsatisfied, with no Council members leaning towards satisfied. The image below contains the Council’s responses. The next portion of the exercise asked, **“What are the Town’s expectations for the development of downtown?”**



## Action Plan

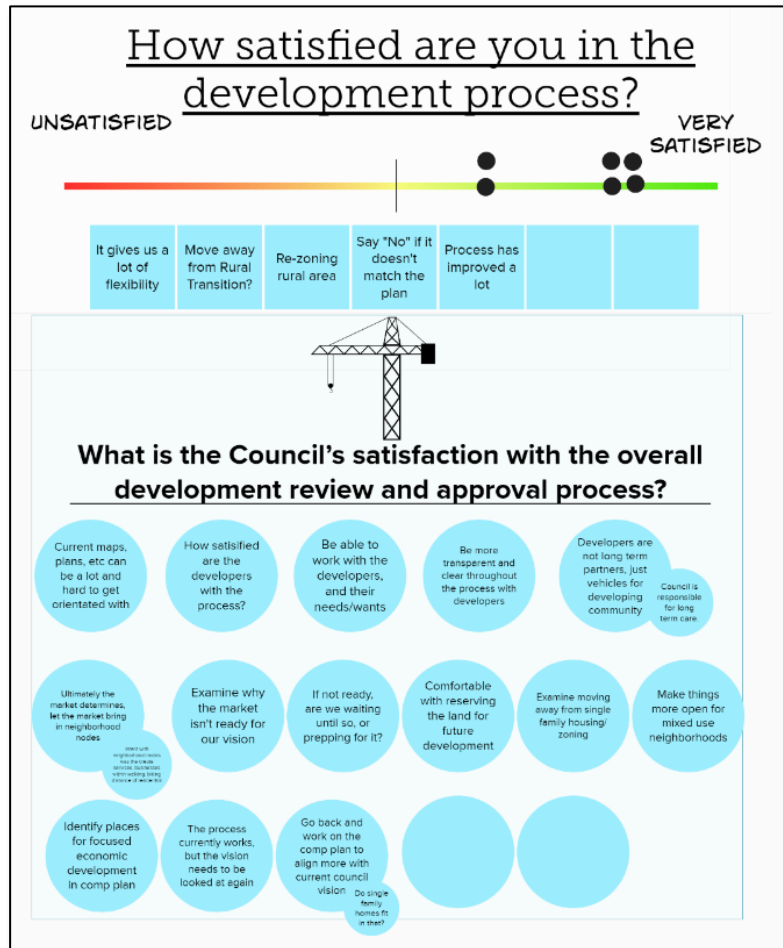
- Examine ways of spreading Downtown across First Avenue
- Examine the potential of hiring a consultant to assist in the development of a small area plan for Downtown
- Examine methods for creating amenities that could pull the Old Town sections together
- Examine ability to allow for cottage businesses in current single-family homes

The Council reached multiple consensus decisions regarding Downtown Development. The first was to direct the Town Manager to research and take first steps in contracting a consultant to assist in development of a revised, small area plan for Downtown. Additionally, the Council decided to also explore creating a unified and consensus vision of Downtown development.

## Development Review

The Council then shifted to a discussion about the development review and approval process. The exercise began with a temperature check, where the Council was asked **“How satisfied are you in the development process?”** The responses were centered more towards satisfaction. The image below captures the Council’s response. The next portion of the exercise asked, **“What is the Council’s satisfaction with the overall development review and approval process?”**

The Council reached several consensus decisions. The first is to direct the Town Manager to examine current zoning regulations as related to minimum square footage requirements for single family dwellings. Next, they directed the Town Manager to evaluate opportunities to create more transparent and upfront relationship with potential developers.



- ### Action Plan
- Benchmark current zoning regulations for minimum square footage regulations for single family dwellings
  - Identifying places for focused economic development
  - Examine why the market is not ready for the Council’s vision for certain development ambitions
  - Creating a better environment for mixed-use neighborhoods

Third, the Council decided to examine potential market reasons why certain development ambitions (mixed-use, neighborhood nodes, etc.) are not currently viable in Knightdale and determine how the Council would like to approach these expectations. Finally, the Council reached a consensus to revisit the [Knightdale Next Comprehensive Plan](#) to make sure it continues to align with Council vision on growth and development.



## Public Safety Facility Needs

After a lunch break, the Council reconvened to discuss the pressing issue of public safety facility needs. The conversation focused on the financial breakdown, costs, and consequences of pursuing the needed public safety infrastructure upgrades. It was relayed to the Council that proceeding with the facility option would constrain debt capacity for the next several years and limit ability to take on any other large-scale investments. A summary of the Capital Planning Discussion to address public safety facility needs was as follows:

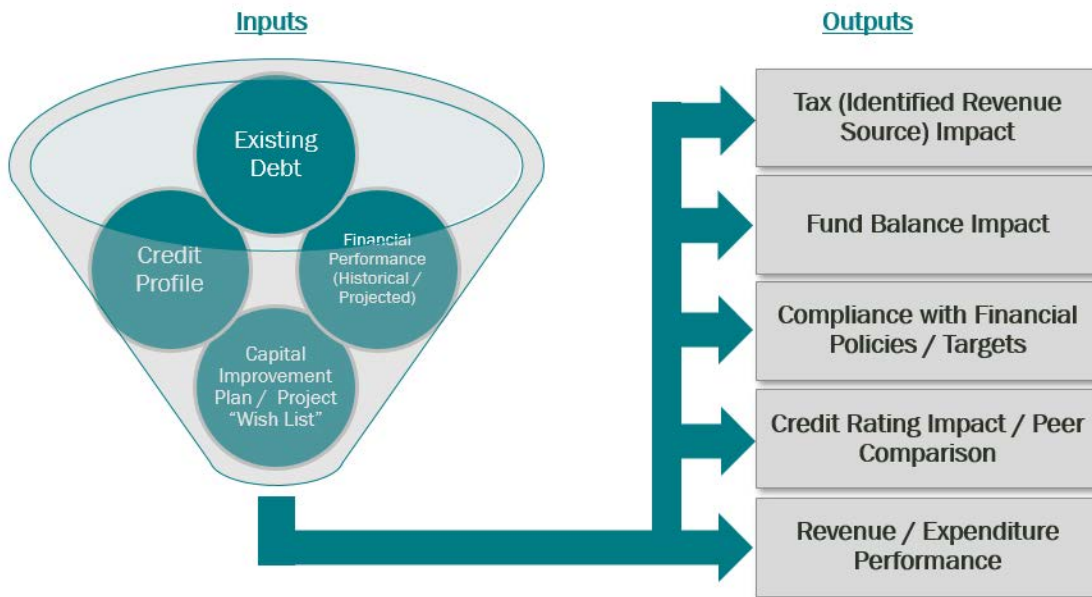
Tim Flora, Knightdale Finance Director, along with the Town’s Financial Advisors Amy Vitner and Walter Goldsmith of First Tryon Advisors provided an overview of the Capital Planning Model tool implemented to evaluate the capital needs of the Town and the respective impact on the Town’s financial condition. The overview narrowed to a specific discussion of the three major public safety projects to include timing, the effect on the Town’s debt capacity, and potential tax impact. The presentation concluded with a discussion of the Town’s Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), and its development during the annual budget process to ensure the Town’s strategic initiatives are integrated with its operational capital needs.

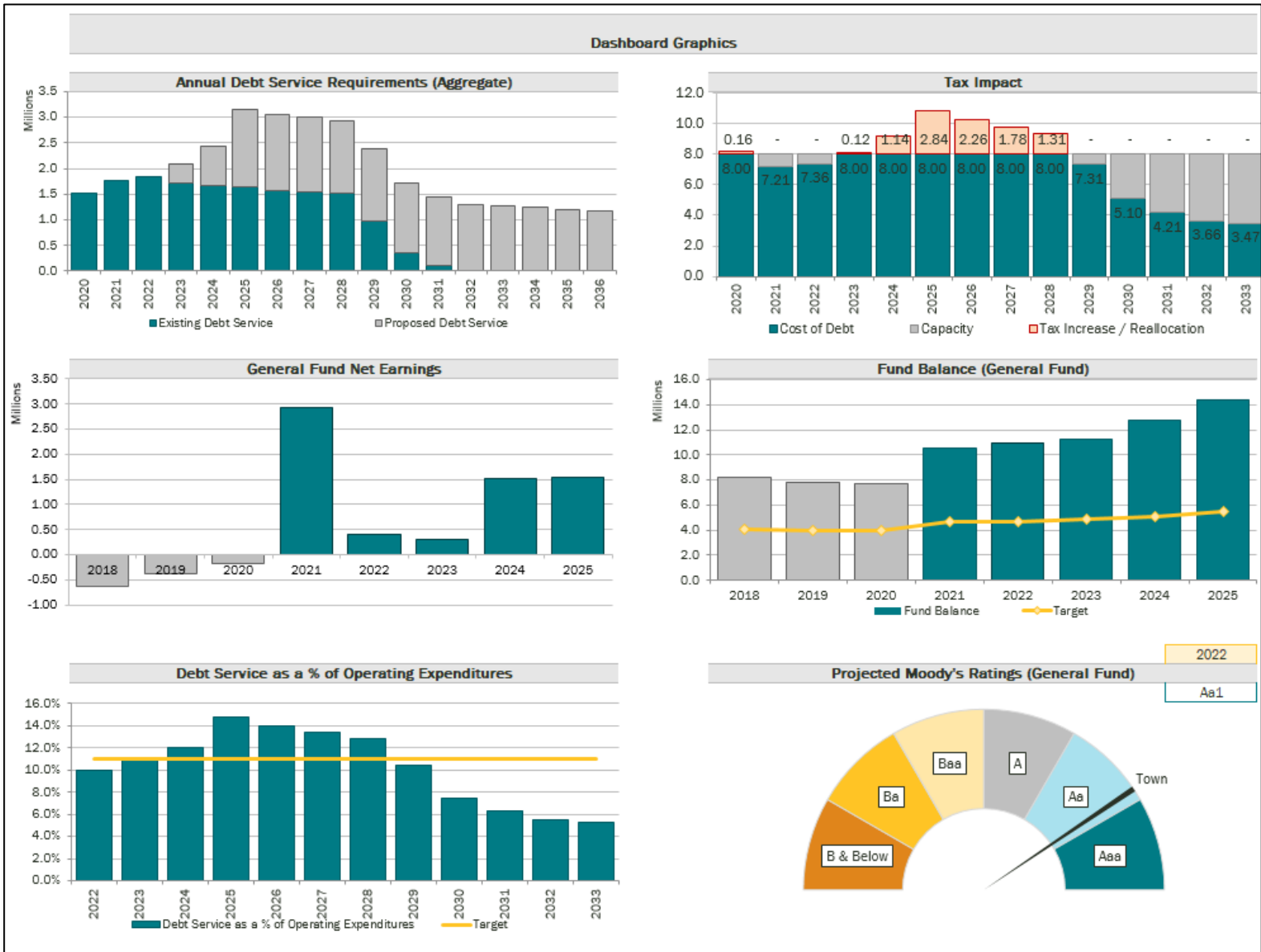
### Capital Planning Model

The Capital Planning Model gives the Town the ability to forecast revenues, expenditures, and the impact of funding proposed capital projects over both a near-term and a long-term horizon. It is designed to be interactive and allow finance staff to run multiple scenarios with different assumptions in a timely manner. Focusing on several key inputs, the model helps in producing desired outputs and provides an easy-to-understand dashboard of projected financial impact.

### Action Plan

- Construct Fire Station #4 on Hodge Road in FY22
- Relocate and construct Fire Station #2 from Steeple Square Court to Forestville Road in FY23
- Repurpose and renovate existing Public Safety Center to Law Enforcement Center (to also house Fire Administration) in FY24





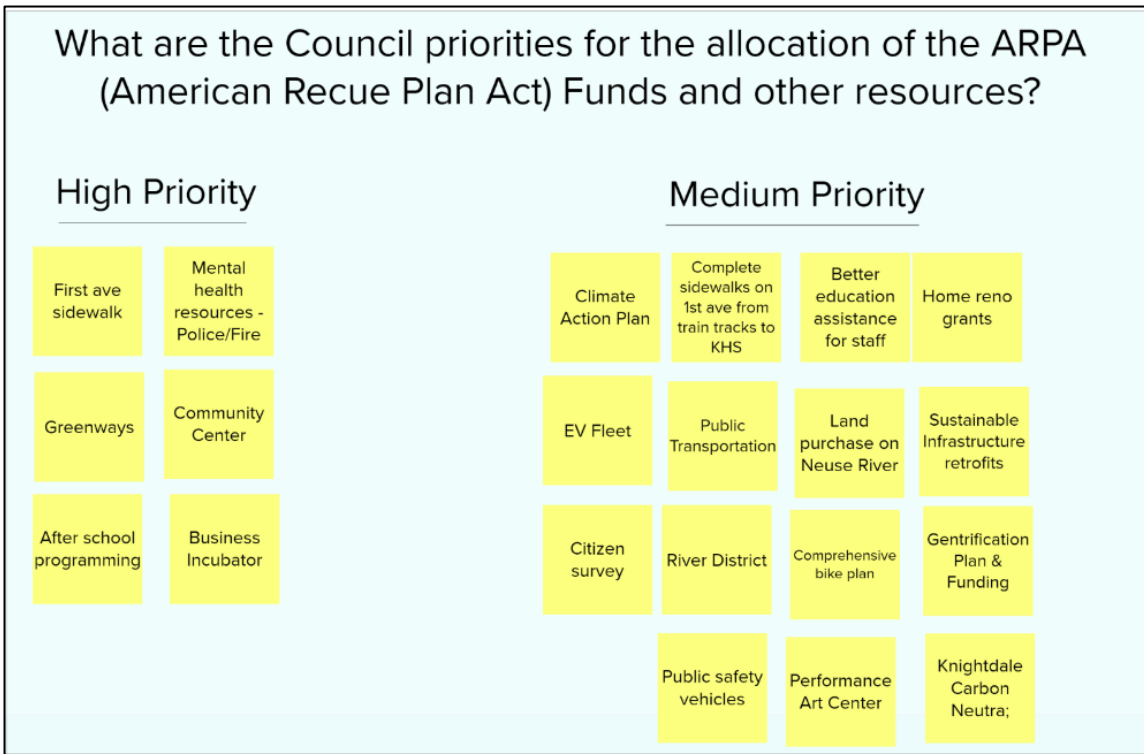
Projected Financial Impacts of Funding Public Safety Facility Improvements

## American Rescue Plan Act

Next the Council discussed ideas for using funds received by the Town from the American Rescue Plan Act and other potential resource allocations, or re-allocations. The graphic below captured the results of the conversation.

### Action Plan

- Determine ARPA eligibility for priorities to potentially include in the Capital Improvements Program (CIP).



### High Priority Issues

- Addition of Sidewalks along First Avenue
- Expanded Mental Health Resources for the Police and Fire Departments
- Improvement and Expansion of Local Greenways
- Construction of Community Center/Senior Center
- Development of a Small Business Incubator

### Medium Priority Issues

- Climate Action Plan
- Electric Vehicle Fleet
- Citizen Survey
- Better Education Assistance for Staff
- Public Transportation
- River District
- Public Safety Vehicles
- Land purchase on Neuse River
- Comprehensive Bike Plan
- Performance Art Center
- Home Renovation Grants
- Sustainable Infrastructure Retrofits
- Gentrification Plan and Funding
- Knightdale Carbon Neutral

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

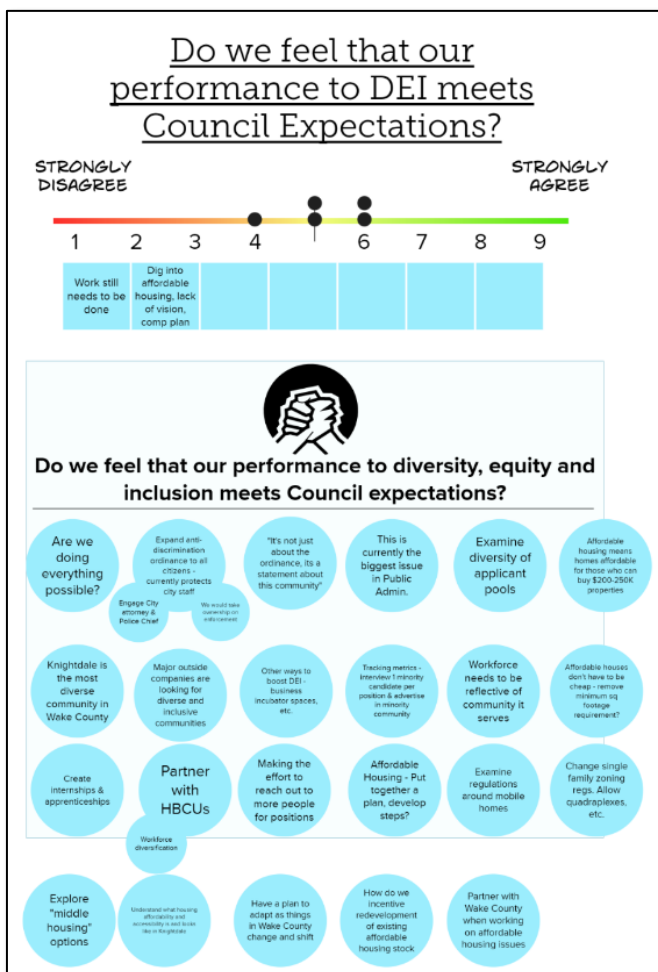
Next the Council discussed Knightdale’s performance on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The conversation began with a temperature check, in which the Council was asked **“Do we feel that our performance to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion meets Council expectations?”** The response ranged from somewhat disagree to somewhat agree with the full response below. The Council then discussed ideas for improvement

The Council reached multiple consensus decisions for moving forward on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion performance. The first was to direct the Town Manager to explore trade-offs of adopting an anti-discrimination ordinance. Next, they directed the Town Manager to partner with HBCUs for potential creation and development of internships.

Third, the Council indicated that they would like the Town Manager to define affordable housing, identify Knightdale vulnerabilities, and adopt an actionable plan to ensure equitable access. Fourth, the Council reached consensus to explore potential partnership with Wake County to ensure affordable accessibility. Finally, the Council decided to reexamine regulations and current opinions surrounding mobile homes. Captured below are comments that reflect these consensus points.

## Action Plan

- Expansion of the anti-discrimination ordinance to all citizens
- Explore partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities as part of workforce diversification
- Examine regulations around mobile homes
- Explore and understand “middle housing” options
- Explore methods to incentivize redevelopment of existing affordable housing stock
- Develop a partnership with Wake County when working on affordable housing issues



## Climate Change

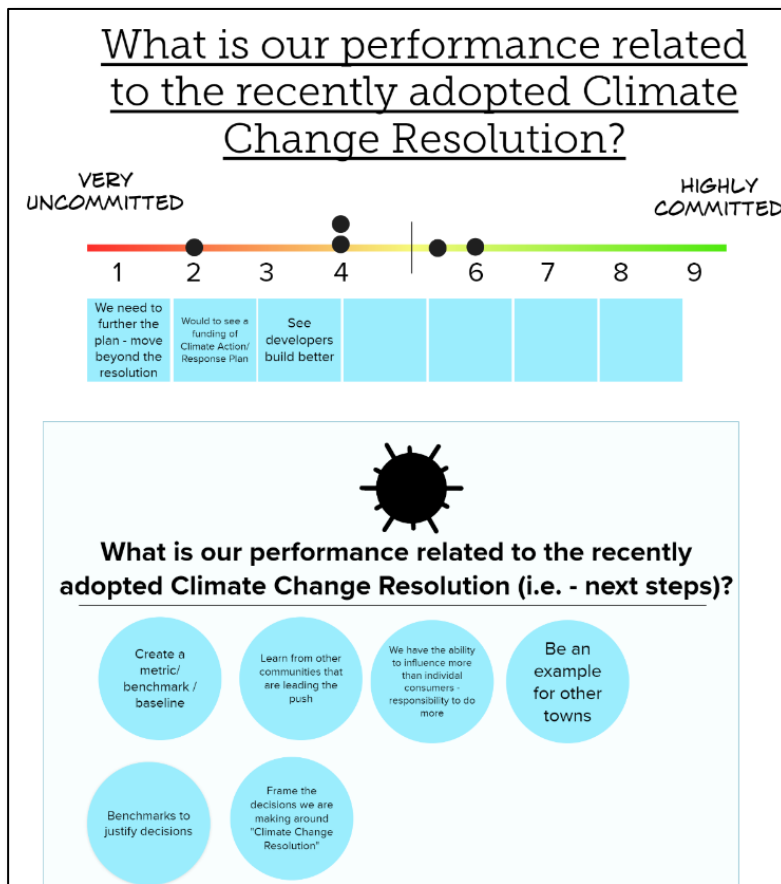
In the final topic of the day, the Council focused on Climate Change, particularly around the recently adopted Climate Change Resolution. The group began with a temperature check on the question ***“What is our performance related to the recently adopted Climate Change Resolution?”*** The responses varied with some leaning towards the Town being uncommitted and some towards the Town being committed. The full response is captured below.

### Action Plan

- Explore creating a metric, benchmark, or baseline to guide Council actions

The Council reached multiple consensus decisions regarding the next steps.

They directed the Town Manager to create a metric(s) and associated benchmark(s) for Town and Council to adopt to continue to push for expanded environmental stewardship. Next, the Council decided to begin the process to learn from other comparable communities across the state that are leading the push for more sustainable and climate conscious action. Finally, it was decided to identify regulatory approaches to frame Council decisions around the existing “Climate Change Resolution”. Captured below are points that reflect the discussion leading to this consensus.



“The Town and Council have the ability more than individual consumers do – Council has the responsibility to do more”

“Let’s learn from other communities that are leading the push for more sustainable and climate conscious action”

“Let’s frame our decisions around our Climate Change Resolution”

“Benchmarks are tools to justify public decisions”



## **IMPLEMENTATION**

The ultimate goal of the retreat is to successfully implement all goals into action. The Town Council assumes the responsibility of setting goals that holistically seek to improve Town's services and quality of life. In turn, town staff is charged with implementing these strategic goals according to the timelines mutually agreed upon by the elected officials and Town Manager. Town Administration will ensure that each goal is incorporated into the appropriate departmental work plans. The Department Directors, under the guidance of the Town's Administration, will complete each strategic goal accordingly. All relevant information will be presented to Town Council for review, deliberation, and consideration for further action at future work sessions. The overall process is designed to ensure that the strategic ambitions of the elected body are met.