

SUMMER - JULY 2023

CHRIS J.
SUGGS
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Kinston City Council
Community Newsletter



Greetings, Kinston!

As your Kinston City Councilmember, I am delighted to share the latest updates on projects that have kept us busy and fulfilled over the past few months. Our tireless efforts led to the successful review, consideration, and unanimous approval of our Fiscal Year 2023-2024 budget. This budget, totaling over \$117 million dollars, touches every aspect of our city—from parks & recreation and police, to our streets, infrastructure, and public services. Additionally, we celebrated ribbon-cutting events for the Kinston Department of Fire and Rescue's new Training Center and the newly renovated Holloway Pool, marking significant milestones for our community.

In alignment with our commitment to public safety, I introduced and supported proposals aimed at addressing issues concerning vicious, stray, and nuisance dogs. Furthermore, recognizing the importance of preserving our rich heritage, I initiated the formation of the Historic Grainger Stadium Commission, dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of this cherished landmark. We also took the necessary steps to modernize our policies by updating the out-of-date travel policy for the mayor & city council that had been in place since 1982.

I am delighted to inform you that the eagerly anticipated renovations of Emma Webb Park are now underway. This beloved community space will soon receive a well-deserved facelift, ensuring that it continues to serve as a gathering place for residents of all ages, all year round.

In this newsletter, you will find updates on these projects and others that I, alongside my colleagues on the Kinston City Council, have been diligently working on. I wholeheartedly encourage you to join me at a future city council meeting, attend my community office hours, or reach out to me directly to voice your concerns, share your ideas, and explore ways in which you can actively contribute to the betterment of our community.

Together, let us continue to build a vibrant and inclusive Kinston that we can all be proud to call home.

Yours in community,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris".

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MORE NEWS ON THE INSIDE!





What's next for baseball in the City of Kinston?

On May 23, the Texas Rangers announced the sale of the Down East Wood Ducks to Diamond Baseball Holdings, a private equity firm with an expansive portfolio of more than twelve minor league teams. The Kinston City Council was informed of the possibility of this sale a few months ago, with little details until it was made public.

The City Council has agreed to assign the existing stadium lease from the Texas Rangers to the new owners, and I look forward to working with Diamond Baseball Holdings as they become the City's new tenant at Historic Grainger Stadium. The Down East Wood Ducks team will remain an affiliate of the Texas Rangers under its new ownership.

It's my understanding that the Texas Rangers affiliated team will eventually move to Spartanburg, South Carolina at some point after 2025. This was reported in Spartanburg's Post & Courier, with an announcement that the team will be housed in a \$250 million dollar mixed-use development to include the stadium, apartments, offices, and entertainment options. The stadium would have 3,500 fixed seats, on top of a 5,000 square foot Club Room.

There are a number of factors that could have influenced the Texas Rangers' decision to sell the Down East Wood Ducks, and Diamond Baseball Holdings' decision to relocate the team to South Carolina. Some will attribute it to the City Council's 2019 delay to fund a new scoreboard at the stadium (this was prior to me joining the City Council), while others may say that the Wood Ducks' challenges to return to their pre-pandemic game attendance may be a bigger reason. There's much to speculate about, but my impression is that our community

just did not have the amenities and market to support the current landscape of professional baseball.

The existing stadium lease for Grainger Stadium is through 2031, and unless Diamond Baseball Holdings decides to terminate their lease, I look forward to working with them to maintain baseball in Kinston. In April, I introduced a proposal for the City of Kinston to establish the Historic Grainger Stadium Commission. There are a number of other baseball leagues and options that communities of our size have been able to attract and maintain, such as wood-bat leagues like the Coastal Plains League, other collegiate-level summer leagues, or exhibition baseball teams. I'm hopeful that our city leadership, the Historic Grainger Stadium Commission, baseball fans, and Diamond Baseball Holdings will be able to work together to identify a new option for Grainger Stadium baseball after the Wood Ducks' departure.

Holloway Pool officially reopened with ceremony

I am thrilled to share the highly anticipated reopening of Holloway Pool! A ribbon-cutting celebration took place on Saturday, May 20, 2023, at the pool grounds, attended by city officials, residents, and esteemed guests—including members of the Holloway Sharks swim team. The Holloway Sharks were an African-American swim team, based at Holloway Pool, active throughout the 1950s until the 1980s that won numerous local and state championships.

Holloway Pool, a cherished landmark for both residents and visitors alike, has undergone extensive renovations and upgrades over the past months. These improvements ensure a safe and enjoyable swimming experience for all members of our community.

I am extremely grateful to our Parks and Recreation Department and the project team responsible for the renovations. The renovations to Holloway Pool were funded using a Community Development Block Grant. As a member of the City Council, I look forward to working with my colleagues and our city staff to explore further improvements to the Holloway Recreation Center, such as upgraded

poolhouse amenities and restrooms. The ribbon-cutting celebration was followed by a "Swim 1922" water safety event hosted by the Zeta Pi Sigma Alumnae Chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.

New policy passed for Mayor and Council travel expenses

During our June 20, 2023 council meeting, I introduced a new policy aiming to establish clear guidelines and procedures for travel expenses incurred by our Mayor and City Councilmembers.

Recognizing the importance of transparency and accountability in local governance, I worked diligently to develop a framework that addresses the needs of our elected officials while promoting fiscal responsibility. The policy, which was voted on and passed unanimously by the council, will supersede the existing City of Kinston policies related to travel authorization and expense reimbursement. The last City of Kinston policy pertaining to the travel of its elected officials was passed in November 1982, and provided little to no regulations.

Under this new policy, elected officials will be provided with a set of clear guidelines regarding eligible expenses, reimbursement procedures, and reporting requirements for council travel. The policy will ensure that the City's resources are utilized effectively while enhancing the ability of the Mayor and City Councilmembers to carry out their duties and responsibilities.

The introduction of the "Policy Statement on Mayor and Council Travel" marks an important step toward refining city policies and establishing clear guidelines and procedures in our local government. The policy proposal aligns with my commitment to transparent and effective governance, ultimately serving the best interests of the residents of Kinston.

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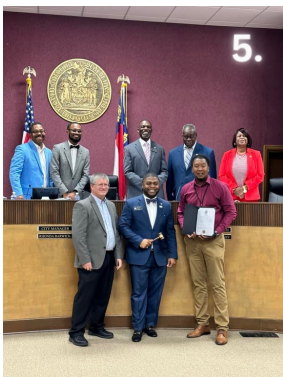
On Saturday, June 24, I spent time at Freedom to Fly's Mental Health Awareness event at Pearson Park. Kinston Community Health Center was on-site providing free health screenings!



This summer, I have attended the Member Appreciation Event and Annual Meeting for Greater Kinston Credit Union. GKCU is one of two Black-owned financial institutions remaining in North Carolina.



I continue to meet with and learn from the dedicated employees who make up our city departments. I recently toured the Johnnie Moseley Water Reclamation Facility with our Public Services staff.



1. Pictured with Mrs. Lisa Faye Williams at Just Do It For Christ Ministries' annual Prayer Walk; 2. Pictured with Flimsy the Clown and local resource providers at a mental health awareness fair at Pearson Park; 3. In my capacity as Executive Director of Kinston Teens, attending the Open House for our Neighborhood Hub; 4. Attending the Kinston Police Department's CLEAR event at Sugar Hill Pizza; 5. Kinston's mayor and city council presenting our Public Services Director Steve Miller and Environmental Services Superintendent Terrell Lovick with a proclamation in recognition of Environmental Services Day; 6. Pictured with Pennsylvania State Senator Nikil Saval and staffer Shania Bennett during a recent trip to Philadelphia; 7. Attending the ribbon-cutting for our new Fire & Rescue training center; 8. Pictured with eighth grade students from Rochelle Middle School on the night of their end-of-year social.

I was recently shared a recording of an interview on The Bryan Hanks Show (the weekday morning broadcast on 960AM hosted by former Free Press editor Bryan Hanks) where former Kinston City Council candidate Michael Martin attempted to make a case for changing the way Kinston's local elections are held.

Currently, Kinston's mayor and city council are elected on staggered four-year terms, on a nonpartisan and at-large basis. This means that, unlike when you vote for President or other federal or state officials, you don't see "Republican" or "Democrat" beside the names of city council candidates, and that any resident of the city limits can vote for the candidates—regardless of what precinct or neighborhood they live in. This

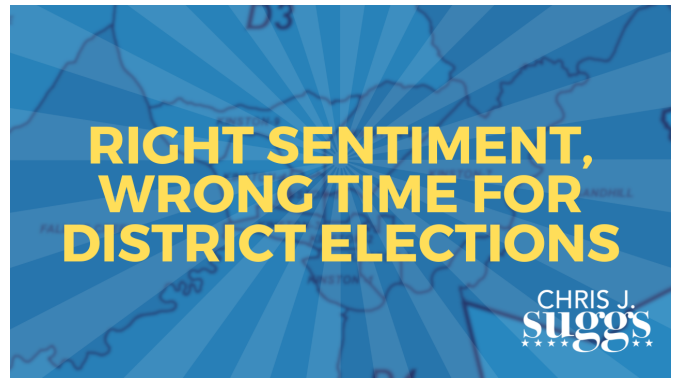
method of voting is not unpopular for communities across North Carolina like ours. Recently, individuals like Michael and others have been pushing a narrative that the City of Kinston should switch to district elections—mostly because they believe Kinston's changing demographics have made it more challenging for white candidates in our community to get elected.

With at-large elections, as we currently have, every member of our city council represents this entire city, and we're accountable to all of its residents. When I ran for city council in 2021, that was one of the most fulfilling parts of my campaign experience—the opportunity to walk through and talk with residents in every neighborhood of this city, to make sure that I heard their concerns and took their input into consideration. If we were to switch to district elections, that would pose a risk of a fragmented city council where its members may focus primarily on their respective districts, potentially neglecting the broader interests of the city as a whole. If I can be frank here, focusing primarily on certain neighborhoods and certain demographics of people has, unfortunately, been the reason that some candidates in recent years have struggled to win seats on the Kinston City Council.

Another one of the challenges with our local elections, as they stand today, is that there is a limited candidate pool. If we were to switch to district elections, with our city's declining population and strained community engagement, I could see the candidate pool becoming even weaker. Lenoir County, which has district elections for the county's Board of Commissioners and Board of Education, has seen several elections now where candidates win the November election because they were unopposed in their district.

Running for office is one of the most fulfilling things I have ever done, but it has also been one of my most expensive and time consuming endeavors. However, the demands and constraints of this undertaking have caused us to have smaller and smaller candidate pools in our elections. In Kinston's 2019 municipal election, with three city council seats up for grabs, we only had four candidates file for the position. One of the candidates, the sole white candidate in that election, had the background and experience you'd expect to find in a city councilmember—but I believe they fell short when it came to reaching across the aisle and building the trust and strong relationships needed to win a seat on Kinston's city council. In fact, their supporters boldly advocated for residents to choose only that candidate on the ballots, and not vote for any of the other three Black candidates in order to give their choice a better chance. When there's three seats on the ballot and you're advocating to *only* vote for the single white candidate in the election, how well do you think that'll go over in a city that is 67% Black?

If we were to switch our elections from being at-large to having a district system in place, it would likely be an expensive undertaking for our community. For starters, this would call for a change to the city's charter through a referendum or ballot measure. Then, the city would have to identify an impartial process to draw the boundaries for these new districts — which would likely involve creating a committee or commission tasked with doing so, and hiring professionals to analyze the demographic data to ensure the districts are fair. The administrative burden of maintaining separate districts, conducting district-specific elections, and addressing



district-specific concerns could lead to increased complexity and costs for the City of Kinston, our elected officials, and our city employees.

I believe that now is past the time for us to identify ways to increase citizen engagement in local government and get more residents involved in the electoral process—it's why I've worked so hard on and off the council to make government more accessible and transparent for all people.

Yet, I don't believe that moving to district elections is the appropriate direction for Kinston at this time based on our current capacity, population, and budget constraints. Instead, we should focus on measures that maintain the integrity of our current electoral system, while ensuring enhanced representation, diverse candidate options, and meaningful opportunities for community input.

There will be three city council seats on our ballot this November, and the filing period for those seats will be open from noon on Friday, July 7, 2023 through noon on Friday, July 21, 2023. If you are interested or know someone who should run for office, I encourage you to reach out to the Lenoir County Board of Elections to learn more about the filing process. **There's a need for ready and willing leaders to put forth their time, talents, and passion to serve our community—ALL of our community—and I hope we will see those leaders step forward in this year's election. We can, and will, create a city where all of our residents feel empowered and engaged in the decisions that shape Kinston's future.**

Did you know?

You can sign up to receive emails and text messages from me to stay in the loop on what I'm up to on the City Council!

Visit www.chrisjsuggs.com/join to become a part of my contact list. You will be the first to know about exciting news, special announcements, and my thoughts and opinions on local happenings.



The City of Kinston also allows for residents to subscribe to email and text notifications for certain emergency alerts, weather notices, job postings, and the City's quarterly newsletter.

Visit www.kinstonnc.gov and click the "NotifyMe" button on the City's homepage.



Other opportunities to stay-in-the-know:

- To reach myself, the mayor, or another member of the City Council, you can contact the City Clerk's office at (252) 939-3115.
- Stay tuned on my social media pages and email alerts to find out about my community office hours to drop-in and ask questions.

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As our city continues to change and grow, an important conversation is to be had around what type of businesses are attracted to our community, what type of businesses do we try to attract, and who makes the decisions on what businesses come here. There is no easy way to answer any of those questions, but I hope to provide you with some helpful context that provides a way for us to have those conversations moving forward. The process is, in fact, quite complex and involves a number of different considerations.

Our local government plays a central role in shaping the business landscape of our community, but the City Council does not decide what businesses come (or don't come) to Kinston. It is, though, the responsibility of the city government

to establish zoning regulations, land use policies, and development plans that guide and influence the types of businesses allowed in specific areas. One example of this would be our October 2022 city council vote to allow tattoo parlors to open in our downtown commercial zoning district. Previously, these establishments hadn't been allowed downtown, or anywhere in the city limits. Thanks to recent changes in our zoning ordinances, there have been two new tattoo businesses to open in Kinston in the last several months.

Economic development agencies, such as the North Carolina Global TransPark Economic Development Region and Downtown Kinston Revitalization, also play a role in attracting businesses and driving economic growth in our community. The Global TransPark Economic Development Region is an alliance between Lenoir, Greene, and Wayne counties that places a strong emphasis on attracting major industrial and commercial enterprises—such as Masterbrand Cabinets' multi-million dollar expansion that will create 540 new jobs. Downtown Kinston Revitalization has played a key role in encouraging private investment in Kinston's 27 blocks of downtown. These agencies can conduct market research, identify target businesses, and encourage strategies that entice businesses that meet our community's needs. Primarily, they act as facilitators between businesses and government, playing a crucial role in attracting desired industries.

The demand, needs, and purchasing power for specific products, services, and experiences in our community significantly influences which businesses choose to establish themselves here. The proliferation of dollar stores in our community is, unfortunately, one example of this. East Kinston, our city's most impoverished and densely populated

neighborhood, is currently a food desert by U.S. Department of Agriculture standards and has no accessible grocery store. Northeast Kinston, and the northeastern part of Lenoir County, is also underserved by grocery and retail options. The variety store conglomerate Dollar General has opened stores in both of these locations because they realize that there is a market opportunity that no other business is currently addressing.

Residents can use their power to demonstrate the demand for certain businesses they desire by contacting corporations and encouraging them to open a location here, supporting existing businesses to show the need for expansion, or even pursuing franchising opportunities with major chains themselves.

Real estate developers and property owners also play a critical role in determining the types of businesses that come to our city. They invest in and develop properties, seeking tenants that will maximize the value and potential of their assets. One recent example of this would be Perry Management, a local real estate firm, and their work to broker deals and recruit businesses to the (previously) empty properties on Hill Farm Road next to Wal-Mart. So far, they've attracted PetCo and State Employees' Credit Union to open locations on this property; and a new car wash is opening nearby.

Members of our community, and our local government leaders, can engage with developers and property owners to convey what the needs and preferences of our community are and help influence their decisions. While we can't force a property owner to do anything with their land or building (I know we all wish we could wave a magic wand and make something happen at Vernon Park Mall), we can share our desires and help them see that certain investments would be

welcomed by the community and profitable for their interests.

As you see, the determination of which businesses come to Kinston involves a multitude of factors and players. The city council, economic development agencies, real estate developers, community input, and market forces all contribute to the decision-making process—but there is no sole person or governing body with that responsibility. By actively engaging with these different entities, advocating for your interests, and staying informed about market trends, you can play a vital role in shaping the business landscape of our city. Together, we can foster a thriving and diverse business environment that meets our needs and reflects the aspirations of our community.

Yours in community,

Chris

Trash Trout approved to help clean up the Adkin Branch

During our May 16, 2023 meeting, the Kinston City Council approved a proposal for a Trash Trout to be installed in the Adkin Branch, a tributary of the Neuse River that flows through Kinston. The Trash Trout is a passive litter tray installed on small creeks to capture trash and other debris. Clean waterways are vital to having a clean future for generations to come, and the Trash Trout, according to Sound Rivers, is the first step to ensuring this happens.

The Trash Trout will be installed in the Adkin Branch just south of Holloway Recreation Center.





Stray, Nuisance, and Vicious Dogs Workgroup Formed

This spring, the City of Kinston partnered with the Lenoir County Government to form a working group to discuss our issues related to nuisance dogs in the city limits. At the recommendation of our City Manager and Police Chief, the City of Kinston has entered an Interlocal Agreement with Lenoir County's Animal Control division to provide animal control services for the city. This will strengthen our ability to address these issues in Kinston and throughout Lenoir County.

Renovations to begin at Emma Webb Park

Throughout 2021, the City of Kinston worked with Kinston Teens, American Flood Coalition, and Design Workshop to lead a community planning process for Emma Webb Park.

This plan includes new recreation amenities, a stream restoration effort, and green infrastructure. It is our goal that the implementation of this plan will make Emma Webb a local and regional model for greenspace restoration and community-centered flood mitigation.

This spring, our plan was awarded an American Society of Landscape Architects Merit Award in Analysis & Planning at the ASLA's Southeast Regional Conference in Atlanta. In June, the City Council approved the first set of bids for demolition work to begin at the park. We are so proud and excited!



New regulations go into effect on July 1

- Parking fines for the City of Kinston, which were previously at \$2 per infraction, have been increased to \$25.
- A new noise ordinance has gone into effect that is based on a decibel rating system, rather than solely at the discretion of the police.
- Planning & development fees have increased, including weed abatement and delinquency charges.
- The Interlocal Agreement for Animal Control is effective July 1.





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Hey there!

I am excited to share my Summer 2023 Community Newsletter with you! I'm honored to serve as a member of the Kinston City Council, and I believe that this community newsletter is an additional avenue for me to update you on the successes and challenges our community faces and the work I do on behalf of Kinston's 19,546 residents to address those issues.

- Chris

Kinston City Council Meetings

City Council Meetings are open to the public! Community members are invited to join us at Kinston City Hall (207 East King Street) on the first and third Tuesdays of each month, at 5:30PM and 7:00PM respectively. During these meetings, we review and vote on action items that affect the city's budget, operations, zoning regulations, and more. At the start of each meeting, time is allotted for citizens to share ideas, feedback, issues or concerns with the City Council and our City Staff.

For more information on our City Council meetings, visit www.kinstonnc.gov or the City of Kinston's Facebook Page (www.facebook.com/KinstonCityHall).

How do I reach Councilmember Chris Suggs?

To request a meeting, presentation, or other engagement related to my work on the City Council, contact the City Clerk's Office by phone at (252) 939-3115.

For questions related to utilities or public services, contact the City of Kinston's 24/7 Customer Service line at (252) 939-3282.



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This newsletter was printed at no expense to the City of Kinston and was paid for by Chris J. Suggs. Feedback, ideas, or contributions can be emailed to chris@chrisjugs.com or P.O. Box 3355, Kinston, NC 28502.